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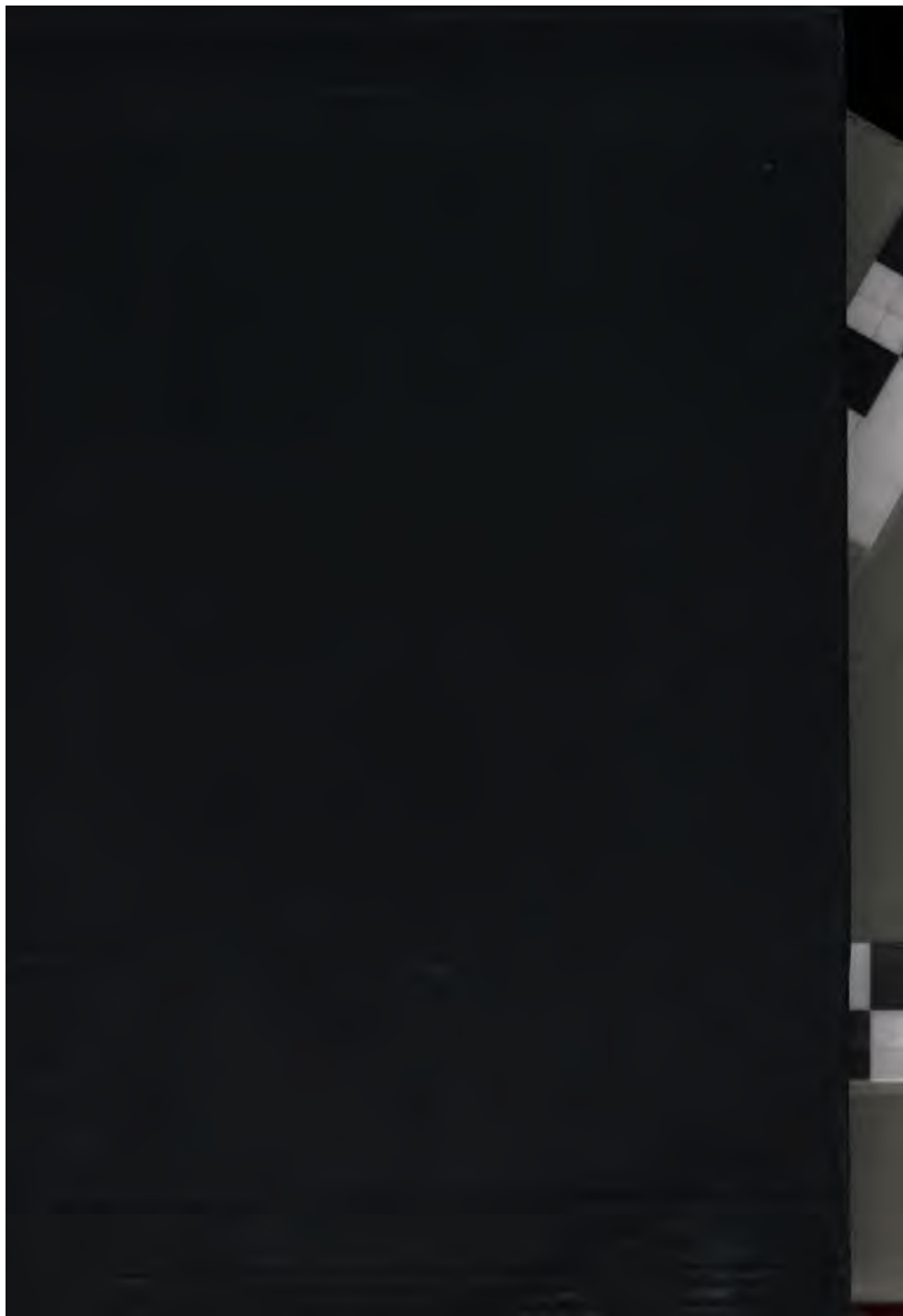
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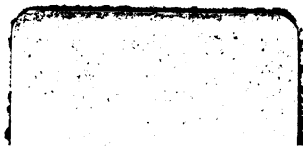
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THE BROWN PORTMANTEAU

AND OTHER STORIES.

THE
BROWN PORTMANTEAU

And Other Stories.

BY

CURTIS YORKE,

Author of "That Little Girl," "Dudley," "Hush," &c.

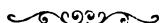
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THE BROWN PORTMANTEAU.



The Brown Portmanteau.

WE were sitting in the library, one chilly May night, my wife and I, and before us stood the subject of this short tale, a brown leather portmanteau, empty, large, and new. It had just come ; in fact I had only bought it that very day, for I was on the eve of starting for a month's absence in Scotland. I intended going straight to Edinburgh, leaving the bulk of my possessions there in the aforesaid portmanteau, and reserving only a small bag for the various expeditions I meant to make thence to small out-of-the-way places. It had caught my eye in a shop in the Strand, as the very thing I wanted ; but now that it had come home, it seemed to me absurdly large—at least twice the size I had imagined it to be. Had any one but myself bought it, I should have pronounced it preposterously *huge*. As it was, I merely observed, in a casual tone, that it was a nice convenient size.

“Why, George, it would almost hold *me*,” said my wife, laughing. Whereupon the foolish little thing got in, and playfully requested me to see if it would shut.

But I was in rather a morose and irritable frame of mind on that particular evening, and only said curtly,

“Don’t be foolish and childish, Jennie.”

And poor little Mrs. Talbot climbed out again, looking rather crestfallen, as well as surprised and hurt, at my sharp and perhaps unmerited snub. We had not been married quite a year, and as yet, snubs on either side were events, not incidents. However, as I have hinted, I was not in a playful humour. In fact I was in an undeniably bad temper. In the first place, I had been painfully reminded all day that I had a liver, a reminder which had become of late most unpleasantly frequent and forcible. Indeed it was on this account that my physician had ordered me to rest from my parliamentary duties for a time, and recommended a month or so of roughing it with my rod and line (my one hobby in the way of sport). I intended going alone, for my wife at that time was not very strong.

In the second place, I had had at the club that afternoon as near an approach to a violent quarrel as was possible for a man of my peaceable tendencies.

Harold Brisbane was a fellow I never could bear, and on this unlucky afternoon I was inclined to bear rather less of him, or anybody else, than usual. A heated and prolonged discussion had arisen in the reading-room of the club of which we were both members, regarding some vexed question of modern philosophy or psychology, I really forget which. At all events, Brisbane’s remarks on the subject appeared to me both senseless and absurd ; and I said so in plain words, after having advanced a few of my own views on the matter, which were at least characterised by probability and common-sense. He

replied in a way in which I could see neither point nor wit, though several of the other men saw fit to grin audibly. No doubt, to some minds, his retort was to a certain extent amusing enough, but it is easy to be funny at other people's expense, especially on personal matters. So I made a few observations which I flattered myself touched him smartly. Then, not wishing to have any further unpleasantness, I rose, and left them to make jokes at their leisure. Hardly had I left the room than I heard a subdued roar of idiotic laughter behind me; and as I walked along Pall Mall, I felt, as I had felt a hundred times before, that it would give me extreme and genuine pleasure to wring Master Brisbane's neck, or otherwise ensure his permanent removal from the haunts of man.

During dinner I had told Jennie of this little *contre-temps*, and she had aggravated me extremely by saying that she never could understand my dislike to Mr. Brisbane; for her part, she thought him charming. Now I knew that Brisbane was an old admirer of Jennie's, and I had felt put out at her warm and un-called-for championship of him. Therefore having snubbed her on the first occasion that presented itself, I felt better. She went quietly out of the room, after having closed the portmanteau; and I, having lit my favourite meerschaum, and replenished the fire, leaned back in my chair, and mentally composed various cutting and withering sarcasms to sear the soul of Brisbane upon the first fitting opportunity. I had just rounded off an imaginary speech calculated to make even a hippopotamus feel uncomfortable—though, to be sure, Brisbane was thicker-skinned than any hippopotamus—when the door opened, and Parks announced—

"Mr. Brisbane."

The little fiend came gaily into the room, as though he and I had been the best friends in the world. I suddenly remembered that he had said something in the afternoon, before our *fracas*, about "looking me up in the evening."

"Well, old man!" he said, with his usual grin. "Found your temper, eh?" (That was another annoying thing about Brisbane; he would persist in addressing me as "old man" and "old fellow," as though we were on the most intimate and familiar terms.)

"How are you?" I said with difficult civility.

"Here I am, you see," he went on, as he dragged a chair to the fire and sat down. "In spite of your little fit of spleen this afternoon, I managed to get over it. There's nothing thin-skinned about *me*."

"No, by Jove, there is not," I thought savagely. But aloud I only said, "No?" in coldly interrogative tones, and filled my pipe anew.

"Of course, you know," he continued airily, as he helped himself to one of my finest cigars, "you were remarkably crusty, old fellow. But then equally of course we all know that liver plays the very deuce with the temper."

"I can assure you," I began haughtily, "that I—"

"Oh, don't apologise," he interrupted, with a wave of his hand. "I quite understand; I forgot all you said a moment or two afterwards. I never bear malice. Don't say another word about it."

When I could get a word in, I assured him emphatically, and with considerable temper, that I had not the slightest intention of apologising. I might as well have *held my tongue*.

"Don't excite yourself, old man," he went on, as he lit his cigar. "It's all right. Beastly thing liver, as I was saying. Good servant, bad master, eh? And you are getting on, you know, Talbot. Let me see now, you must be close on forty, are you not?"

"I really fail to see how my age can possibly concern you, Mr. Brisbane," I observed freezingly.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the little wretch. "You are beginning to be touchy on that point, eh? Well, when I get on a little, I dare say I shall wince when age is mentioned, too."

Brisbane, according to his own statement, was twenty-nine. If he was no more, he was the oldest-looking man for his age I ever beheld. To be candid, I *was* touchy about my age, for, between ourselves, I was at that time already on the wrong side of forty, though I am confident I did not look it, and my wife Jennie was only nineteen.

"Shall I have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Talbot to-night?" said Brisbane, after a pause—of silent fury on my part.

"I fear not," I replied stiffly. "I fancy she has already retired." I hoped he would take this as a hint to curtail his visit, for I observed with some surprise that the hands of the timepiece pointed to twelve. I had not imagined it so late. What did the fellow mean by disturbing people at such an hour?

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I had no idea it was that time of night."

"It *is* rather late," I observed, proceeding to wind up my watch. But hints were thrown away upon Brisbane. He leaned back in his chair, and looked aggravatingly

comfortable. He was not a bad-looking little fellow. Women, I believe, usually considered him handsome; Jennie said *she* did. I, on the contrary, had no pretensions to good looks at all. But I was considerably his superior in height and build, for I exceeded the five feet ten allowed to be the ordinary height of men by at least two inches, and was broad in proportion. Brisbane was slimly built, and barely stood five feet six.

"Your wife is a sweet little woman," was my guest's next remark—"a very sweet little woman. You are a lucky fellow, Talbot. I hope you make her a good husband."

I was conscious of a raging desire to kick the fellow out of the room. I restrained myself with difficulty, and gazed at him with haughty displeasure and contempt. He was not looking at me, however, and presently went on meditatively,

"Ah, Jennie and I were a great deal to each other—once. I was hard hit, I can tell you."

Here the fellow stopped and sighed. I sat in speechless indignation, while he continued,

"Poor beggars like me have small chance against you fellows with rent-rolls as long as your arm. You always cut in before us. The almighty dollar generally ranks before anything else with a woman, worse luck. It was a toss-up between us, and you won—at least your dollars did."

A paroxysm of rage and amazement rioted within me. Was the fellow mad, or drunk? I laid down my meerschaum, and looked at him for a moment in infuriated silence. He met my gaze calmly and steadily.

"Do you mean to imply, Mr. Brisbane," I said, as

soon as I could speak, "that my wife preferred you to me, and only married me because of my worldly position?"

"You've about hit it," he answered laconically.

I rose to my feet, and leaned against the mantel-piece.

"You are an infernal liar!" I said, slowly and distinctly.

He rose also. He had turned perfectly white; his eyes flashed.

"Come, Talbot," he said, very quietly, but still with that ominous light in his eyes. "You have gone too far this time. Take back your words, or—"

"Take back *your* words," I said, through my shut teeth, "or I swear I will *kill* you!"

"I shall take back nothing," he returned fiercely. "Nay, more. Your wife was engaged to *me* when you proposed to her. She broke off her engagement to me at her father's bidding, but she *loved* me. She cried her heart out in my arms the day before her wedding day. Make what you like of *that*, you self-sufficient fool! Ay, and she loves me *now*, she—"

"*D——n* you!" I broke in violently. In another moment my hand was on his throat, my brain reeled, a red cloud swam before my eyes. I shook him like a dog, and flung him violently to the ground. As he fell his head struck with a dull, horrible sound on a sharp corner of the fender.

With clenched hands and labouring breath I stood over him, waiting for him to rise. But he did not rise. The blow had stunned him. Ay—it had done more!

There was a pause—how long I know not—during which a ghastly silence reigned.

Then I knelt down beside him, and said hoarsely, "Brisbane! are you hurt? For God's sake, speak!" For his eyes were wide open. Still he lay there, unanswering, motionless. I raised his head, and saw that there was a small three-cornered wound just above his left temple. My frantic efforts to restore him were in vain. It was useless to chafe his hands, to pour brandy between his lips, for he was *dead!* I felt his heart, his wrist. Heart and pulse were still. *Dead!* Merciful Powers! was I a *murderer*, then?

I staggered to my feet, and locked the door. Then I sat down at the table, and hid my face in my hands, frozen with a deadly numbing horror.

The house was quite still; the ponderous tick of the antique clock which stood in the hall was plainly audible in the silence. The wind had died down, and at intervals sobbed fitfully at the casement, and in the chimney. I heard my wife come to the door, and turn the handle. "George!" I heard her say, "George—let me in!" But I told her to go away—that I did not wish to be disturbed. My voice, even to myself, sounded far away and hollow.

"George!" her entreating voice sounded again through the stillness. "George—open the door!"

But I did not answer, and presently I heard her cross the hall, and the echo of her footsteps die away upon the staircase.

I sat there for an hour longer. My eyes, magnetised, rested on the still figure and pale features of my victim. The horror I felt had now merged itself into a ghastly fear. Slowly I realised what I had done—*what I must still do!* Three courses were open to me. Which *should I choose?*

Explain that the affair was the result of an accident, that Brisbane had stumbled, fallen, and, in so doing, received the blow which had unhappily proved fatal? No. The time which had elapsed without my giving the alarm, and since death had taken place—our quarrel in the club that very day—my well-known dislike of him—all would tell against me. Give myself up, then? Break Jennie's heart—blight my career for ever—stand my trial for *murder*? Never! What course then remained?

Only one. *I must get rid of the body!*

Ay—but how?

Sick and dizzy, I rose to my feet, and as I did so a sudden inspiration flashed across my mind. *The portmanteau!* It should conceal my crime! It seemed to me, by the light of the dying lamp, to have assumed an abnormal size. It was open, too. I could have sworn it was shut but a moment before!

I stooped, dragged the unfortunate man's body across the floor, and lifted it into the portmanteau, where it fell in a limp, shapeless heap. He was a little slight fellow, as I have said, but he seemed to me almost childishly slight and weightless now. A look of horror and reproach gleamed in the violet depths of his wide-open eyes. I tried to close them, but I could not.

As I was about to shut down the lid, I noticed that one of his hands hung over the edge. I put it back hastily, shrinking from the touch of the nerveless fingers.

Then, after a moment's thought, I took all the papers and letters out of his pockets, and burned them.

As I did so, a photograph slipped from its envelope, and fell into the ash-pan, face upwards. I picked it up,

and saw that it was *Jennie's*; one of some that she had had taken only two months ago. All remorse left me then; and with a passionate oath I fiercely closed the portmanteau, strapped it securely, and locked it. This done, I threw myself, exhausted, into a chair. Great drops of sweat stood on my forehead. I was trembling like a girl. I poured out a glass of brandy, and drank it eagerly; then I unlocked the door. At that moment the lamp flickered, blazed into sudden brilliancy, and went out. Some impulse made me go back and feel if I had locked the portmanteau. Yes, I had.

The hall was quite dark, and I groped my way upstairs. Stealthy footsteps seemed to keep pace with mine.

Jennie was asleep. The moonlight fell upon her tranquil face and closed eyes. Happy Jennie! Sleep was impossible to me—sleep, and rest, and peace—for ever. For on my forehead—on my heart—was the brand of *Cain*!

I do not know how I passed that night. I neither undressed nor lay down. I think I walked miles in the fitful darkness of the quiet room, torn alternately by the horror of my crime, and the passionate grief of learning that my adored wife's heart had never been mine—always another's! Once Jennie stirred in her sleep, and murmured some half-indistinct words. I stopped, and listened. It is possible to feel jealous even of the dead. The moon, long obscured, shone out again. I leaned over my wife's pillow, and saw her lips move. It was Brisbane's name she murmured. My heart sickened with jealous agony, and again remorse fled.

Hark! What was that? From downstairs there

came the sound of hideous, prolonged, muffled laughter. My blood seemed to freeze in my veins. I shuddered violently, and resumed my restless pacing up and down the room. Strange to say, no feeling of hatred to Jennie was in my heart for her falseness to me—her duplicity. I only seemed to pity her. For was she not the wife of a *murderer*?

The hours went on, sometimes in darkness, sometimes in moonlight—for it had not struck me to light the candles—and I still walked up and down, and thought—thought—until my brain seemed bursting. At last my plans were formed; and, worn out, I sank into a chair, and leaned my head against the cushioned back. Then I saw that the day had dawned, and heard the clock downstairs strike four.

During breakfast I informed Jennie, harshly enough, that I had packed some books, extra clothes, etc., in the new portmanteau, and would take my old black one as well, which, I added, was also packed and strapped.

"Very well, dear," she replied, "but would you start to-day, George? You look so ill. I wish," wistfully, "that I were going with you." She came and laid her arms round my neck as she spoke, and I saw that her eyes were full of tears. I sat silent, pale, and submitted passively to her caress. Would not one think she loved me? But I knew better. I rose abruptly, and shook off her little hands; my heart full of rage and misery.

I was to start by the 9.45 for Edinburgh, and it was now 9.20. I bid a brief "Goodbye" to Jennie, and touched her forehead coldly with my lips.

"George," she called out, in a wavering little voice, as I was stepping into the brougham, "you have no label

on the brown portmanteau." But I took no notice, and was soon driven rapidly away.

I arrived in Edinburgh about eight o'clock.

"Any luggage, sir?" said an obsequious porter, as I stepped out on the platform at Waverley.

"One black portmanteau, labelled Talbot," I replied laconically.

I drove to the Clarendon in Prince's Street, where I had already wired to secure a room. On entering my bedroom, the first thing I saw was—did my eyes deceive me?—the brown portmanteau!

"Here," I said hurriedly to the man who followed me with the rest of my baggage, "have this thing taken out. It is not mine."

"No, sir?" queried the man doubtfully. "Same label—same name, sir."

I turned cold. There *was* a label. It *did* bear my name, but it was in *red* ink!

"Yes, I see it is the same name," I said with forced calmness, "but I tell you it is not mine."

"Would you mind letting it remain here for to-night, sir?" he said. "There is no other gentleman of that name in the house, and it's mortal heavy."

What could I say? To refuse would but be to excite suspicion. And yet I *could* not pass the night with the cursed thing in the room.

However, before bedtime, I got them to let me have another apartment, explaining that I could not sleep in a room which faced the street, as I was out of health, and easily disturbed. Happily there was a vacant bedroom looking to the back. True, it was about half the size, but I would not have cared if it had been too small!

to swing the traditional cat. I myself watched the removal of my traps from the one room to the other.

I retired early that night, for I was fatigued and overwrought, my faculties seemed numbed. I could hardly think consecutively. The newspapers seemed full of horrible murders. I fancied the other men in the coffee-room looked at me suspiciously.

When I reached my room, I closed and locked the door, and placed the candle on the dressing-table. As I caught sight of my face in the glass, I started violently, for, looking over my shoulder, I saw *another face*! It was Brisbane's. The wound in his forehead showed distinctly, his eyes were wide, and blue, and staring. Trembling and sick, I turned my head. The room was empty, of course, but at the foot of the bed was—the brown portmanteau! I swore under my breath, and sank heavily into a chair. Had the senseless fools not understood me when I said it was not mine? I gazed at it, fascinated. A horrible conviction came over me that it would open—that it *was* opening.

But I shook off this foolish fear, and, having lit another candle, threw myself on the bed, dressed as I was, and lay feverishly counting the hours until the day should break.

In the morning I started for Kinross. I had arranged to meet a friend of mine there—a Dr. Kendal, and we intended having a few days' fishing on Loch Leven, before going on to Loch Tay. A sense of relief took possession of me as I drove away from the hotel, and left behind me for ever the horrible record of my crime. A new phase of feeling possessed me now. A passionate remorse for my irrevocable guilt seemed to swallow up

all my former jealousy of poor Brisbane. It could not be true that Jennie had so deceived me. I knew she loved me; for, indeed I was not an unlovable fellow. Poor Brisbane, very likely he had imagined the whole thing. And I—I had murdered him!

But by the time I had got into the train my mind had wheeled round again, and my crime seemed not only justifiable but commendable. I ground my teeth as I thought of his insolent words. Nevertheless, it was well I had taken such precautions, as the law might not take my view of the matter. As I thought how secure I was *now* from detection, I laughed aloud.

There were two ladies in the carriage with me. I saw them whisper together, and look at me with pale scared faces. They got out at the next station, and I was alone. I was beginning to dread my own company, and was thankful when the train reached Kinross. At the hotel I found a telegram from Kendal to say he had been prevented from joining me—very sorry, etc. I ordered luncheon, but I could touch nothing. Then, almost mechanically, I took my rod and tackle, hired a boat, and went out on the loch. I remained out as long as I possibly could, until it was quite dark and very cold. I had a good basket, I believe. I listlessly watched it weighed, then went up to the hotel. I was chilled to the bone, and deadly tired—tired with a horrible depressing lassitude—but not sleepy. My brain was singularly clear and active—my memory also. I could have written every detail of my life since childhood. But I longed to rest my tired limbs. I ordered a glass of hot whisky and water, and after drinking it off hurriedly took my candle and went upstairs. My room was No. 29, they told me.

As I reached the door, a trim chambermaid passed. She stopped, and said civilly,

"Some more of your luggage came while you were out, sir. I had it brought up to your room."

"Some more of my luggage," I repeated: "what the ——" But as I opened the door the words died upon my lips. For before me, grim, uncompromising, stood the brown portmanteau!

"Who brought this? When did it come? It is not mine!" I exclaimed violently.

The girl looked surprised.

"I don't know, sir. I'll inquire," she said, glancing at me curiously.

But on inquiry it proved that no one knew exactly how it had come, or when. But the hideous thing was there, unmistakably. What was the meaning of its inexplicable weird reappearance in this unaccountable way? Would my crime thus pursue me, haunt me, for ever? I fancied—unreasonably, doubtless—that the people in the hotel looked at me strangely, and with suspicion, as I had fancied in Edinburgh on the previous day. It seemed to me that they must know what that ghastly thing contained, and I dared not ask to have it taken away.

I passed an unspeakably horrible night. My candles rapidly burned themselves out, and in the surging darkness I seemed to hear low indistinct mutterings, and fiendish mocking laughter; to feel a clammy hand touch me, and twine its fingers in mine. As the dawn broke, I could have sworn I saw, in the faint uncertain light, shapeless, gruesome forms glide past the bed, featureless, save for wide, staring, gleaming eyes—Brisbane's eyes, always.

I rose early—long before the household was astir—as weak and shattered in nerves as though from months of wasting sickness. My own reflection in the glass startled me. As I was dressing, I remembered that I had promised Jennie the day before I left home (years ago, it appeared to be) to write and wire to her from Edinburgh. I had done neither. However, I went out and despatched a wire as soon as I was dressed, to say I should leave for Edinburgh by the first train, and arrive in London in the morning. Another night like the last would leave me a raving maniac for life. I had a confused idea, too, that at home, with Jennie, my terrible secret would be easier to bear.

In the bright clear sunshine of the following morning I reached London. I had travelled all night, taking care to select a carriage with several other occupants.

I reached Connaught Square shortly before nine. Parks looked at me insolently as he admitted me, or I fancied so. Jennie was crossing the hall as I entered. Her face was pale and almost stern.

"I expected you sooner, George," she said, as she led the way to the library, where breakfast was laid. "I wired you to Edinburgh two days ago to come home. And some of your luggage came last night," she added, as I followed her into the room.

"Some of my luggage!" I gasped. "*What* came?" But before she answered, I knew. Yes, there it was! My blood ran cold. *It had come quicker than I had!*

A deadly faintness came over me. I staggered to a chair, and, leaning my elbows on my knees, covered my face with my hands. Jennie looked alarmed.

"George, what is it? Are you ill?" she said hastily.

"Yes," I muttered. "I have been very ill since I left home. Give me some brandy."

She brought it to me. Then she said,

"Did you not get my wire?"

"No," I answered heavily. "Why did you wire?"

"George," she said, and her voice sounded hard and strained—"George, something very strange has happened. Harold Brisbane has disappeared!"

"Has he?" I said stupidly.

"Yes. His sister sent round the day you left to know if he had been here. And Parks says he let him in shortly before twelve on Tuesday night, and—he did not let him out again. He has never been seen since!"

There was a pause. Then I recovered myself with a start.

"I saw him out," I said, carefully avoiding her searching eyes. "He left me at about a quarter past twelve." (Never, even in the whole course of a successful parliamentary career, had I told so many flagrant lies as I had during the past few days.)

At my wife's next words my heart almost stood still.

"Did he go *without his hat and coat*, George?" she said in a low clear voice, while her eyes met mine with the gaze of an accusing angel.

I started, and *felt* the colour leave my face. Oh, fool, fool! With all my care, had I forgotten *that* damning evidence? My lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"George!" she went on, with a terrible fear and horror in her voice. "George! *What have you done with him?*"

I met her eyes then, recklessly, defiantly. *Jennie* suspected me!

"What is that to you, madam?" I returned, fiercely. "What is *he* to you? Dare you answer me?"

"Yes, I dare!" she answered, with a wild, bitter cry. "He was the man I loved!" She threw up her arms and fell; and as she fell, one arm flung itself over the devilish portmanteau, with its ghastly secret.

They took her away, and I sat silent and brooding in my chair. Some one came to remove the breakfast things. I had not eaten, as I had not slept, for days. But to eat with *it* in the room—I could not.

The day passed. I had not moved. Afternoon came—then night. I rose mechanically, and lit the lamp; the fire had gone out, and darkness meant madness. Then I locked the door, and took out my revolver. What was left but that? Nothing. A felon's death should never be mine. As I took the weapon from its case I heard again, distinctly, the low chuckling laugh I had come to know so well.

Heavens! the portmanteau was unstrapped—unlocked; it was slowly opening! I shuddered—sickened. If it opened any further I felt I should go mad. Suddenly I heard the tramp of feet in the hall, the confused murmur of many voices. The door was tried, shaken violently. Then blow after blow resounded on its panels. My hands shook, lights danced before my eyes. Where were the cartridges? Ah, I had found them. I should have to be quick, though. The door was yielding. In another moment with a loud crash it had given away. I saw a blurred mass of figures and faces; heard harsh, rough voices, and with a wild laugh I hastily loaded the revolver and raised it to my forehead. In a moment it was struck from my hand. It fell, and exploded as it

reached the ground. My arms were pinioned behind me. I struggled fiercely—

But what was this? Who was before me? Had my brain given way at last? I stared wildly round me. The officers of justice had disappeared, the fire was burning cheerily, and a genial voice was saying,

“Why, Talbot, old man, hope I haven’t disturbed you! Taking forty winks, eh?”

Reader, have you ever been tossed about, shipwrecked, on some frail spar for weary torturing hours, and at last, when you had given up all hope, caught sight of a sail bearing down upon you? Have you ever returned from desolate exile to behold once more the dear home faces you never expected to see again? Have you ever, after days of parching thirst in the cruel desert, laid your burning lips to the cool, clear waters of a long-sought spring? If you have ever done any of those things you may have a faint, only a faint idea of what my feelings were, as I stood, giddy, stupid, incredulous!

For it was Brisbane’s voice! And Brisbane himself stood before me—no mouthing spectre—no horrible haunting corpse—but *debonnair*, smiling, *alive*!

I paused one moment to assure myself that I was not mad, but only—*awake*! Then, with a muttered fervent thanksgiving, I wrung that man’s hand as heartily as a few hours ago I would have wrung his neck, and ejaculated in tones that shook in spite of myself,

“*Brisbane*! Upon my soul, I am glad to see you!”

And if ever I spoke the truth I spoke it then.

A DRAWN GAME!



A DRAWN GAME!



EDGAR Allen Johnson was sitting, on a May afternoon, in the private room of his office in Exchange Court, in the city of Liverpool. The sunlight slanted across his sleek brown head, and made the splendid diamond which adorned the little finger of his left hand sparkle fiercely. Mr. Johnson's was an aristocratic hand, slender and white, for the possession of which he was indebted to some remote ancestor whose name was *not* Johnson. "Gentleman" was stamped upon every feature of his calm, clean-shaved, expressionless face. "Scoundrel," by some unaccountable omission on the part of Nature, was not written there. His features, though well-shaped, were small.

After a time he desisted from his occupation of absently covering the blotting-pad before him with tiny ink-dots, and rising abruptly, took up his position on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fireplace.

He was a tall man, slimly built, with a well-poised head and square shoulders; and as the light fell more strongly upon his face, it was noticeable that his eyes—

which were blue, and very closely set together—were clear and guileless as a little child's. He found those eyes very useful upon occasion ; useful beyond the ordinary use of eyes. They were eyes that could look straight into yours, while their owner was concocting, or relating, statements or incidents which might be absolutely false. They had had a good deal of practice. He was thirty years old ; and during all his life he had never yet told the truth when a lie would do as well.

The glib falsehood flowed from his tongue with a smoothness and air of truth which would have deceived, and did deceive, the most wary and suspicious of the fascinating Johnson's friends and associates.

In the eyes of the commercial world Mr. Johnson was a rich man. In the eyes of his confidential clerk and himself, his firm was tottering on the brink of ruin. Nothing short of a miracle could save it, and Edgar knew that the days of miracles were past.

He was evidently thinking deeply as he stood there on this May afternoon. His forehead was contracted, his thin, well-cut lips pressed closely together. Suddenly an indescribable agitation passed over his features, accompanied with a quiver slight and fleeting as the trembling of a calm lake stirred by some passing breeze. He advanced quickly towards the table, and touched a small bell which stood thereon.

A clerk entered the room.

"Saunders—a hansom."

"Yes, sir ;" and the door closed again.

Mr. Johnson got into his light overcoat, drew on his gloves in the calm, gentlemanly manner in which he did most things, took up his hat and stick, went downstairs,

and leisurely entered the hansom, which he directed to a certain house in James Street. In a few minutes the hansom stopped at a dingy ground-floor office in James Street. The most prosperous firms sometimes carry on their operations in the dingiest of offices, and the firm of "Levi, Dorrell & Co.," brokers and shipowners, bore this out faithfully. It was a very prosperous firm, and had during the past year made some very lucky speculations.

Mr. Johnson, having instructed the cabman to wait, threaded the tortuous maze of passages which led to the sanctuary where Levi & Co. transacted their mighty business and made their piles of gold. He handed his card to the sunny-looking clerk, and after a minute's delay was shown into the room where, in attitudes of conscious wealth and power, sat the senior partner, Mr. Levi, and his colleague, Mr. Dorrell. Mr. Levi was short, stout, dark, with the features of his race, and an eye which in a horse would have been called "wicked." Mr. Dorrell was also dark, but tall and thin, well-shaped and gentlemanly. The third occupant of the room, seated at a distant desk in a corner, was a Mr. Skimp—presumably the "Co." He was, however, a mere echo of the two senior partners, and never appeared to take any active part in the business of the firm. He did not even look up as Mr. Johnson entered, but went on writing with a very audible quill-pen.

Mr. Levi and Mr. Dorrell were rather impressed by the manner and bearing of their visitor, who had an air of deferential yet dignified courtesy which told in his favour at once. His voice, as he remarked upon the chilliness of the weather for the season of the year, had a silvery, high-bred tone which was not the least striking

of his many charms. The partners were surprised to learn that he was only a cotton-broker. After a few preliminary remarks—in which, as his name, calling, and place of business were chiefly concerned, Mr. Johnson did not find it necessary to employ his inventive talent—he proceeded to enter into particulars of his projected business with Levi & Co.

“I understand, Mr. Levi,” he said, with his clear blue eyes fixed upon the “glittering monocule” which added lustre and efficacy to Mr. Levi’s left eye, “that you grant advances upon cargoes in transit, if shipped in your vessels. I think,” he continued deprecatingly, “I need not mention the *position* my firm holds in the mercantile world ; but, like many others in these times, my capital is locked up to a degree which prevents my extending my business as I should like.”

“Quite so,” assented Mr. Dorrell, blandly.

“Quite so,” said a faint echo-like voice from the corner desk.

Mr. Levi bowed slightly, and indicated a wish that Mr. Johnson should proceed. Mr. Johnson crossed one leg lightly over the other, and went on—

“I have been in the habit of shipping cotton from Alexandria by the vessels of Jones & Co. ; but if you, gentlemen, can see your way to make to me the necessary advances on cargoes, I propose transferring my business to your firm. At present I have two thousand bales of cotton ready to ship here from Alexandria, for which I want an advance of twenty thousand pounds. This only, of course, on your receipt of the usual bills of lading from Alexandria ; and,” with a courtly bow, “should you desire to make any inquiries regarding the

standing of my firm, etc., I trust that you will find all things satisfactory."

"We know your firm well by reputation, Mr. Johnson," said Mr. Levi, "though we have not had the pleasure of knowing you personally until to-day."

"Then," said Mr. Dorrell, "after due inquiries—which in your case, Mr. Johnson, are a mere matter of form—we shall be pleased to make you the required advance, on receipt of the formal bills of lading from our agents in Alexandria."

Mr. Johnson bowed gracefully and took his departure.

That night Mr. Johnson had important business which detained him in his private office until the small hours of the morning. He was writing; not in his usual rapid and continuous style, but laboriously and haltingly. Had you stood behind his chair for a second, you would have seen that he was carefully copying a signature, which read thus:—"Abdul Pinero." He spared no pains with his work, and it was long after midnight when he leaned back in his chair and inspected the result of his labours with keen scrutiny and critical approval. The imitation was perfect. It had been a troublesome signature to copy. Abdul had an awkward trick of spreading the capital P backwards, and entwining it round his Christian (!) name, in a style which was rather a ticklish thing to imitate; but it was not too ticklish for Edgar Allen Johnson—few things were. Having locked this precious document, with a duplicate—and also the genuine bill of lading from which he had copied the signature—carefully into his safe, he tore up and burnt the various spoiled and smeared sheets of letter-paper which lay about the floor. Then he turned out the lights, locked the doors, and went downstairs.

As he walked along the almost deserted street he took out a cigar and lit it. And as the match sprung into sudden brilliancy, it lighted up his face, and showed that the expression on every feature was as serene and tranquil as if his night's work had not been the preparation for a dastardly crime. He did not go direct home, but strolled down by the river, and finished two more cigars. He carelessly threw a shilling to a little crouching blue-lipped beggar-lad who stood shivering in the chill May wind on the pavement.

"God bless you, sir," gasped the astonished waif gratefully.

Two days later he received a note from Messrs. Levi & Co. requesting him to call—a request with which he lost no time in complying. The interview was brief, and conceded all he wished. The firm was willing to grant him the advance he required—upon the receipt of the duplicate bills of lading from Alexandria, which they now awaited.

Mr. Johnson took his leave, and repaired to his office, where he told one of his clerks, in a preoccupied tone, to address an envelope to Messrs. Levi & Co. He subsequently placed in this envelope the forged bill of lading, and sealed it up. Then he wrote a long gossipy letter to a friend in Alexandria—an easy-going, "head-in-the-clouds" kind of fellow, who would suspect nothing—and in a postscript asked him, as a special favour, to post the enclosed letter for him in Alexandria on the day when the ship *Estrella* was "cleared." Having despatched this letter, he strolled along to Castle Street, and gave orders at a certain shop—where he was not in the habit of dealing—for a small iron-bound box to be made and sent to his rooms, with as little delay as possible.

Three weeks later Mr. Johnson was again in Messrs. Levi & Co.'s office. The bill of lading had been received ; and, all preliminaries having been satisfactorily arranged, and the necessary documents as to interest having been duly signed, Mr. Levi drew his cheque-book towards him, and signed a cheque for twenty thousand pounds.

"And I trust, Mr. Johnson," he said pompously, as he tore off the precious slip, "that though it is our *first* transaction, it may not be our *last*."

"Our last !" repeated the echo in the corner.

Mr. Johnson bowed with grace ; but as he took the paper from Mr. Levi's hand, that gentleman might have noticed that Johnson's hands shook.

The *Estrella* was signalled in due course ; and Messrs. Levi & Co. despatched a clerk to the docks for the ship's papers.

The captain was on deck as the clerk—who, by the way, was named Davis—crossed the gangway.

"Good morning, Captain Marsh," he said pleasantly.

"Good morning," returned the captain gruffly.

"Had a fine passage ?" pursued Davis.

"Middling. Roughish in the Bay."

"Rather a heavy cargo this time, haven't you ?"

"No, lighter than usual," was the reply.

"But," said Davis, with an air of surprise, "you've got two thousand bales of cotton on board from Pinero and Co."

"Haven't a bale of cotton on board," returned the other briefly.

"What !" said the astonished clerk. "Are you sure ?"

"Sure ? Of course I'm sure," answered the captain, in surly tones. "Who should know, if I don't ?"

"Well, I may just go back again," said Davis.

"You'd better," observed Captain Marsh grimly ; "you'll not find what you're looking for here."

Davis made his way back to his employers' office, and with considerable trepidation informed them of the non-arrival of the expected cargo. Dorrell turned pale, and Levi became perfectly green.

"There must be some mistake!" said the former, hurriedly.

"I don't know, I'm sure, sir," stammered the clerk.

"Don't know, you idiot!" roared Mr. Levi. "Who expected you to know? Leave the room."

A hurried telegram was despatched to the agents in Alexandria ; and in the course of a few hours the terse answer was flashed back—

"No such consignment despatched to you. Some mistake."

The partners looked at each other—aghast!

"Holy Abraham!" gasped Mr. Levi.

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Dorrell.

"Good Heavens!" echoed the Co.

In five minutes Mr. Levi was driving furiously up to Exchange Court ; where it is needless to say he did *not* find Mr. Johnson. Nor did he find any one else connected with the firm. The door leading to the offices was locked ; and a card neatly tacked thereon, bearing the inscription—

"On the Continent for an indefinite time."

Upon reading this announcement Mr. Levi burst into the next office with such sudden violence that the clerks jumped from their stools in dismay. Here he learnt, in answer to his almost inarticulate inquiries, that the offices

of Johnson & Co. had been closed for rather more than a week.

Upon arriving again in James Street, Mr. Levi was in a state of agonised rage and excitement baffling description. He was a singularly choleric old gentleman ; and threw himself into his chair, flinging his hat upon the ground.

"We've been swindled !" he almost shouted, excitedly. "*Swindled !*"

"Swindled !" echoed the "Co." faintly.

Mr. Dorrell sat for a few minutes pale and silent ; but in all firms of two or more partners there is usually one who talks, and one who acts ; and in this firm Mr. Dorrell was always the one who acted.

"We had better send for Bolton," he said at last ; and Bolton, the celebrated detective, was sent for. Bolton said little, but listened gravely and respectfully to Mr. Dorrell's calm statements, and with seeming sympathy to Mr. Levi's incoherent ravings. Mr. Skimp meekly ventured the remark that "he hadn't thought much of Johnson from the first," which irritating remark was repaid by the senior partner with a withering glance at Skimp, which caused that worthy to subside at once into his corner.

All the documents were produced, and most carefully examined by Bolton. The detective—after the manner of his kind—looked inscrutable, and said very little.

The affair was placed entirely in his hands, and after some days' inquiry the firm of Levi & Co. found that they had been very successfully swindled, all the documents being forgeries. Mr. Levi's cheque had been cashed on the day it was received ; all in Bank of England notes

none of which had been passed or changed in Liverpool. The inference was that Mr. Johnson had taken them with him to London, with the intention of changing them into gold. It was for this purpose, Mr. Bolton said, that the previously mentioned iron-bound box had been ordered by the thoughtful and accomplished Mr. Johnson (twenty thousand pounds in gold being, as the detective remarked dryly, *rather* an awkward sum to carry about on the person). It was also ascertained that Mr. Johnson had left his rooms more than a week ago, at a late hour in the evening; and that a gentleman answering his description had, on that same evening, taken the night express for London. Upon hearing these details Mr. Levi delivered himself of some fine Hebrew expletives.

"But how," said Mr. Dorrell, "did he get Pinero's signature to copy?"

"A simple matter," replied the detective. "He had some small shipping transactions with Pinero & Co. before, which enabled him to possess himself of one or two of their forms of bills of lading. This plot was not hatched in a few days."

"The scoundrel!" stormed Mr. Levi—with several strong and effective adjectives—"I'll trace him, I'll hunt him down, if I spend every penny I have in the world. Find him, Bolton, and I'll make your fortune."

Mr. Bolton did his best, and it was usually a very good "best." He traced him first to London, then to Paris, then to Irun, and thus across the Spanish frontier, beyond which it was of course useless to follow him. The celebrated detective therefore returned to Liverpool baffled and considerably crest-fallen; and presented himself once again in Messrs. Levi & Co.'s office, and with unwelcome tidings.

"Follow him through Spain, drag him back by force—drag him to the dock!" almost screamed Mr. Levi.

"Dock!" echoed Mr. Skimp faintly.

Mr. Dorrell and Mr. Bolton, between them, evolved a subtler plan, which was finally adopted.

"Spare no expense," were Mr. Dorrell's last words to the detective. "We give you *carte blanche*—but, *bring him back with you.*"

"I will do my best," said Mr. Bolton, and bowed himself out.

* * * * *

Two men were lounging, one hot August evening, on the verandah of the Fonda Alameda at Malaga. Both were smoking; and from their conversation, they were evidently recent acquaintances.

"Yes," the elder of the two men was saying, with a strong American twang, "I'm travelling for pleasure. I've made a pretty tall sum in mining, and I mean to enjoy myself. I intend running pretty well over Europe during the next month. I don't take sudden fancies, now, as a rule," he went on, "but I've taken a fancy to you. I like your sort. What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say," answered the other, in clear, high-bred tones; "but my name is Frederick Steyne."

"Thank you. Mine is Kemp—Josiah Washington Kemp—at your service. Here's my card. You are an Englishman, I calculate?"

"Yes. You are an American, I presume?"

"That's so," returned the other, sticking his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat—"Josiah Washington

Kemp, of New York City—United States. I guess you are travelling for pleasure too, Mr. Steyne?"

"Well—no," said the person addressed, carefully selecting a fresh cigar; "I am only here on a little matter of business. A relative of mine—an uncle, in fact—died here lately, and left me a small fortune. I thought of starting business either here or in Seville." And Mr. Steyne's blue eyes, as he spoke, looked clear and guileless as a child's.

He was a tall, well-made man, with a short fair beard, and a heavy fair moustache. His manners were winning exceedingly; his hands were slender and white, with filbert nails.

His companion was tall too, but stoutish and dark, with a clean-shaved lip and jaw, and a pointed black beard. He looked at Mr. Steyne attentively as that gentleman nonchalantly lit his cigar. He admired the perfect repose of his manner—his utter tranquillity and self-possession. So very English!

"I feel we are going to be friends," he said, as Mr. Steyne handed him a cigar from an exquisitely mounted case. "I'm sorry now we didn't get to know each other sooner. I've been here for three days."

Then he went on to give his companion a frank and rambling account of his life and adventures, and how he had made his "pile." Altogether he was very communicative. And Mr. Steyne soon became confidential too; telling how he had come out to Spain six years before; how he had lived for the last three years in extreme poverty and ill-health, and how thankfully he had hailed the small windfall which had lately befallen him. He spoke, too, in affecting terms of a much-loved younger

brother, who had died of cholera during the preceding summer, and whose death had been an acute and terrible grief to him.

"You haven't been in England lately, I suppose?" said Mr. Kemp, looking attentively at a very pretty little Spanish girl who was crossing the street below.

"Oh, no," replied the other. "I have not seen England since I left it six years ago. I hadn't the means, even had I wished it; besides, I have no longer any interests there."

As he spoke he flicked the ash from off his cigar, and sighed.

"Ah," said the American. They talked on indifferent subjects until the clock struck eleven; then they parted for the night.

As the days went on they became fast friends apparently, and the one was rarely seen without the other.

"Look here, Steyne, my boy," said Mr. Kemp one afternoon, as they sat in the shady verandah, "I have an idea!"

"Surely—for Mr. Kemp—that is nothing uncommon," observed Mr. Steyne, with a courteous smile.

"I've been thinking," went on Mr. Kemp. "You say you have never seen much of Madrid. Neither have I; and I guess it's rather an interesting little place. Why shouldn't we take a run up there together; not straight up, but doing all the places of interest on the way?"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Steyne, blowing a tiny curl of smoke into the air as he spoke, "you have misunderstood me, I fear. The little sum my uncle left me—though a fortune to *me*—does not admit of such extravagance as you mention. Much as I should enjoy the trip you propose——"

"Pooh!" broke in the other brusquely, "don't have any nonsense. My dear Fred—excuse me calling you Fred; you're so like a friend I once had of that name, I can't look on you as a stranger—I've more money than I know what to do with. Let me do the thing—I guess you'll be doing me a favour—it's flat enough travelling alone; and I tell you I don't know when I felt so drawn to any one before. That's so."

Mr. Steyne at this moment was leaning his elbow upon the back of his chair; his clear eyes fixed unwaveringly on the eager good-natured face of his companion. It was an intense, penetrating gaze; and the American, after a second or two, said with not unnatural surprise—

"What are you looking at?"

"I was trying to remember who you reminded me of," said the other. "I know now."

Mr. Kemp poured out a full glass of Manzanilla, and took a long drink before he spoke.

"Yes?" he said then, interrogatively.

"It was," went on Steyne dreamily, "up in Santander. A man was killed there some months ago; he was knocked down by a runaway horse. Your face reminds me of his."

"Ah!" said the other. "Well, what do you say to my little scheme? Will you come?"

"My dear fellow," replied Mr. Steyne objectively, "I really should enjoy it extremely, but——"

"Then that's settled," said the American in brisk tones. "No, I'll take no refusal. We'll start this very day, or to-morrow. We'll have a right royal time; and we'll give the Spaniards fits all round."

Mr. Steyne made no further objections. They did

start the next day ; and they certainly *had* a royal time. They went from Malaga to Granada, Cordova, Seville, Badajos, Ciudad-Real and Toledo, and took countless other places *en route*. They visited the Alhambra by moonlight ; they ogled lovely black-eyed señoritas ; they attended bull-fights by day, and masked balls by night ; and they spent money like water. Finally, they arrived in Madrid and took up their quarters at the Fonda de Paris, in the Puerta del Sol.

On the second day after their arrival in the Spanish capital, Mr. Kemp, who had been out for some time, entered the cool marble-tiled apartment where his travelling companion was stretched upon two chairs, with a cigar between his lips, and a small glass of curaçoa at his elbow, and said in accents of pleased surprise—

“Now isn’t this the most fortunate thing? I’ve just had this”—holding out an open letter—“sent on from Toledo. It’s from an old friend of mine—a countryman, too—he’s been yachting about for the last few months, and is going to put in at Bayonne. He’s very anxious I should meet him there, and take a short cruise ; and when he hears we are together, he’ll be just as pleased to see you ; he’s a regularly hospitable fellow, and as rich as a Jew. Let me see, now,” running his eye over the letter ; “we’ll have just about time to get up there by the time he arrives. We’ll start at once. He says he has some very pretty girls on board, too. Why, Fred, it’ll be a considerable bit of fun.”

“I hope you will enjoy your cruise, Kemp, my dear fellow,” said Mr. Steyne ; “but I am sorry I cannot accompany you. I must really get back to Malaga this week. I was just thinking so when you came in.”

"Pooh," returned the other, "a couple of weeks or so won't make much difference. Your business can stand, I guess. We'll give up our rooms to-night, and start in the morning."

"No, really," persisted Mr. Steyne, "I couldn't think of intruding on your friend's little circle. It's very kind of you, Kemp; but, really—I had rather not."

"Oh, bosh! I won't take any denial," said Mr. Kemp, good-humouredly. "If you were once there, I bet I wouldn't get you away again in a hurry," he went on, with a sly wink. "All the women would fall down and worship that *Señor Ingles* way you have. You're a sad fellow among the ladies, Fred."

But "Fred's" mind was made up apparently. Malaga, and not Bayonne, was his "ultima Thule"; and not all the American's persuasions, remonstrances, and finally bad language, had any effect upon his determination.

"But—hang it all—why not?" said Mr. Kemp in exasperated tones, as he sat astride on a chair, leaning his chin on the back, and looking puzzled and mortified.

"Shall I tell you?" said the other, settling himself more comfortably in his chair, and leisurely lighting a fresh cigar. "I think you'll admit my reasons are good ones. Have a cigar?"

"No," impatiently. "Well—your reasons?"

Mr. Steyne examined the end of his cigar attentively, and then said, fixing his clear eyes on his companion—

"I am indebted to you for a very enjoyable trip—I think quite the most enjoyable trip I ever had. You have been most generous—princely, indeed. I think I may say I shall never forget you; and should we meet again—which, unhappily, is, I fear, a remote chance—I

trust we may renew our—hitherto—very pleasant intercourse——”

“Yes—yes, that’s all very well,” interrupted Mr. Kemp, with a wave of his hand. “But it’s not to the point. I want to know why you won’t go.”

“I’m coming to that,” said the other tranquilly. “Unforeseen accidents sometimes happen. Your friend’s yacht, for instance, might take a run over to England—while I was on board. Now, the climate of England doesn’t suit me. That is one reason. The other reason is this. I like you—nay, I am fond of you—as Mr. Kemp, the American, in Spain—but,” in slow, deliberate tones, “I don’t think I should like you quite so well as *Mr. Bolton, the detective—across the frontier!*”

For fully a minute there was a dead silence. Mr. Kemp—or rather Mr. Bolton—rose from his chair, and moved mechanically to the window. He felt literally stunned and speechless with rage and chagrin—added to the mortifying consciousness of being as completely “done” as if he had been the veriest novice in his profession.

“You look faint,” observed his companion courteously. “Pray allow me to ring for some brandy. It will be only a small item in Messrs. Levi & Co.’s already—I fear—rather heavy expenses!”

Mr. Bolton felt as if he could cheerfully have strangled the calm, polished, gentlemanly-looking villain, who leant back in his chair with such easy, unstudied grace, and with that half-mocking smile in his deceitfully frank eyes.

“You are an infernal scoundrel, Mr. Johnson!” he gasped, as soon as he could speak—shaken out of all his usual imperturbable self-possession.

Mr. Johnson shrugged his shoulders gently.

"Possibly," he answered, with an exasperating smile. "Had I been otherwise, I will conclude that you would not have taken quite such an interest in me. Do have a cigar; you will find them really good. No? Then have a turn outside. You look rather upset."

Mr. Bolton left Madrid within an hour, but—he did *not* join his friend at Bayonne.



WAS IT A MISTAKE ?



WAS IT A MISTAKE ?



ONE chilly afternoon in February, a very pretty, very determined-looking young woman was standing, dressed for walking, before one of the artistically draped mirrors which adorned a certain cosy drawing-room in South Kensington. She was regarding the very seductive vision which was reflected in the aforesaid mirror with large, serious, seemingly unappreciative eyes. They were lovely eyes, by the way, dark, soft and expressive. Her features were small, and sharply cut ; her figure was all a woman's ought to be ; her *tout ensemble* was bewitching enough to satisfy the most captious critic of charms feminine. The only other occupant of the room was an elderly lady who sat in an easy-chair near the fire. She was a *real* elderly lady, with a real cap and real grey hair. Usually she wore a real smile too, but it was replaced on this occasion by a distinctly unreal frown.

"You make me feel almost angry, Nina," this lady was saying, with would-be severity, "and your Aunt Lavinia is very much disappointed. You have refused a

truly estimable man, a most worthy man, and in a splendid position as far as means go—for no reason whatever, except——”

“Except that I hate him,” rejoined the young person addressed as Nina, with vicious emphasis, putting up one daintily gloved hand to adjust the absurd little spotted veil which covered half of her charming face. “I would rather be thrown from the top of St. Paul’s, or—or be *boiled alive* than marry Mr. Peter Harding! Ugh! I can scarcely bear even to *dance* with him. I would as soon marry a *toad*! So now, Aunt Jane! If you are tired of me,” hotly, “why I——”

“Tut, tut! my dear,” said Aunt Jane, “don’t be silly. But this is the *fourth* good match you have refused lately, to my certain knowledge,” she continued regretfully; “and you know, Nina, you are twenty-five——”

“Twenty-four and a half, dear,” gently corrected her niece.

“Well, it’s all the same; and your Aunt Lavinia says
——”

“That she had fourteen offers before she was sixteen!” interrupted Nina glibly. “One from a marquis, two from millionaires, seven from baronets, and four from large landed proprietors. I know the list by heart! That she was married before she was seventeen, and was a grandmother at—was it *twenty-eight* or *thirty-eight*, auntie?” she concluded with an air of innocent inquiry.

But Aunt Jane did not laugh. She thought it almost treason to laugh at “Aunt Lavinia,” who was her only sister, long since widowed, and who ruled the whole household with a rod of iron—except one member, and that one refractory member was Miss Nina Ferrers, who,

being an orphan, had lived with these two aunts, her only relatives in England, since she left school. She disputed Aunt Lavinia's authority vigorously and continuously, and listened with silent scorn to that lady's long-drawn-out tales of the havoc she had made among susceptible male hearts in days gone by.

"Twenty-four!" said Nina, turning away from the mirror, and rolling up her eyes in mock dismay, "and still Nina Ferrers! Terrible! And nearly all my contemporaries have deserted me to join the ranks of the glorious British matrons. And yet—are they any happier than I? Edith Mowbray, for instance; she has diamonds *ad libitum*, the handsomest horses in London—or out of it, *carte blanche* at Worth's and Elise's, and, for anything I know, at Hunt and Roskell's as well. How happy she must be! Her husband is a great bloated *beast*, of course, with two ideas—his dinner and his wine-cellar, especially the latter. But what of that? A mere detail. Nellie Allingham, too, she fell in love with and married the handsomest man it has ever been my lot to behold. She adores him still; and he—well, his *affaires du cœur* are as numerous as ever, perhaps rather more so. Poor Nellie! Annie Dering, too; *she* ought to glide through life on velvet. She is now Lady Cardonnel; her settlements were princely, she is as beautiful as a dream, she has society at her feet, and her entertainments are more sought after than any in town. Of course she is happy. True, they say his lordship ill-uses her brutally in private. They also say she hates him like poison. I know she looks like the ghost of the girl she used to be. But," with a shrug, "what will you? You can't have everything. Poor pretty Mabel, too, who

married an old horror with both feet in the grave, and broke her lover's heart—— But I will not particularize further. On looking round the circle of our married acquaintance, I do not think wedded bliss is—to speak paradoxically—conducive to happiness. As a matter of fact, I heartily admire Aunt Lavinia's *bête noire*, Violet Carlin, who ran away from her fat old stockbroker of a bridegroom on her wedding morning, and took wing for the East to nurse our glorious heroes in the Soudan."

"Violet Carlin is going to be married to Captain King, of the Artillery," said Aunt Jane quietly. "Mrs. Laurie told me to-day. I forgot to tell you."

"What—Felix King? I know him. He'll break her heart before six months are over their heads. I thought Violet had more sense. Well, I must go, or it will be dark before I get back."

"Now, my dear," said Aunt Jane, "let me entreat you not to make yourself late. It is *not* safe to be out after dusk. Your Aunt Lavinia says——"

"That villains are lurking at every street corner," said Nina saucily, "for the express purpose of waylaying unprotected females in general and Nina Ferrers in particular. As if a woman of *my* age could not take care of herself! No *lady* is ever insulted now-a-days, so long as she behaves and looks like a lady. Times are changed, darling, since you and Aunt Lavinia were young," she concluded, with an impulsive hug. "Is there anything I can do for you?" she added.

"No, unless you should be in the Strand, and have time to call for your Aunt Lavinia's watch."

Nina's shopping occupied more time than she had calculated upon, and when she left the jeweller's shop

mentioned by Aunt Jane—where she had had to wait some little time—it was almost dark, and the lamps were already lighted.

“How provoking!” she thought. “I wanted to go to see that engraving the Romers were talking of. I might run along yet. I will; and I can take a hansom from there.”

No sooner decided than acted upon, and in a few minutes she had reached the printseller's ever-attractive windows. The engraving she sought was not in the windows looking to the Strand; so she turned down Savoy Street, where she became so absorbed, first by the picture she had come to see, and then by several others, that “Big Ben's” deep announcement that it was six o'clock caused her some dismay. As the last stroke boomed through the air, a hansom drove up to the kerb behind her with a noisy rattle, the doors were flung back violently, even for the doors of a hansom, and the next moment Nina felt a grasp on her arm, and heard a man's voice say in shaking tones:

“Oh, my darling—at last!”

With a terrified exclamation she turned quickly, and found herself gazing into the agitated face of a tall, aristocratic-looking man, a total stranger to her. For a moment she stood actually motionless with fright, then wrenched her arm away and darted down the street. This was foolish, for it was now quite dark, and Savoy Street is not a busy thoroughfare. He overtook her in a second, and again his hand grasped her arm.

“What do you mean, sir?” she exclaimed haughtily. “Let me go—*instantly!*”

“Let you go!” he replied in rapid, passionate tones.

"Never again—never again." Then more quietly, "Adela, be reasonable. My wife, come home; and I will forgive everything—forget everything!"

"You are most insolent, sir," she returned indignantly. "Let me go at once, or I shall call a policeman." (Why, oh why, she thought, had she disregarded Aunt Jane's injunctions?)

She made a quick rapid movement, but her captor foresaw it, and held her fast.

"No, by Heaven," he said in a fierce undertone, "you shall not escape me again." And so saying, before she could even guess what he was about to do, he had hurried her towards the waiting hansom, lifted her in, and, giving some quick, sharp direction to the driver, took his seat beside her, and closed the doors smartly.

"Police! help! police!" she almost screamed, recovering from her momentary stupefaction, as the horse moved forward. "Police!" she shrieked again, with a wild gasp of hope, as one of the protectors of the "lieges" sauntered up the street. He stopped and turned.

"Ah, let me out!" she cried excitedly. "Quick! help! help!"

One or two passers-by turned, glanced at the group carelessly, then went on their way. The policeman, who with a gesture had stopped the cabman, advanced hastily.

"What is this, sir?" he said in quick authoritative tones, laying his hand on the door.

"This lady is my wife," said Nina's companion haughtily. "You will oblige me by telling the man to drive on."

"It is not true," shrieked Nina; "I never saw him before. Let me out; let me out!"

"You see? She has been ill," went on the stranger rapidly.

"I see, sir," said the agent of the law, with a sudden access of civility, looking curiously at the struggling girl, and at the same time letting his fingers close on a couple of gold coins. "All right, cabby."

The horse started forward, and Nina was borne swiftly away through the darkness. She screamed and struggled, and strove to push open the doors, even to climb over them; but her companion put his arm round her with an air of proprietorship inexpressibly gentle, but inexpressibly determined too, and said almost sternly, "All this is useless, Adela. You are only paining both yourself and me by this pretence of not knowing me—your own husband."

"Oh, this is insufferable!" she exclaimed passionately. "My name is *not* Adela. I am not married. You *know* I never saw you before. It is cowardly—*horrible* of you! Oh, what shall I do! what shall I do!" And throwing herself back in the corner, she burst into wild, hysterical sobs. Her companion had partly withdrawn his arm, only leaving it in such a position as would enable him to prevent her escaping.

"Worse than ever!" she heard him mutter under his breath. Then, after a pause, he said indistinctly, "Is the thought of coming back to me so horrible to you? Are you so hard—so changed, *still*?"

But Nina took no notice, only sobbed more wildly.

"You know you have been ill, darling," he went on in soothing tones, as though speaking to a sick child. "You are not your own loving self. Everything will be clear to you by-and-by. Ah, my wife! can you not trust yourself to me?"

He was so evidently in earnest, so much under the influence of some almost uncontrollable though strongly suppressed emotion, that Nina looked at him for a moment in incredulous amazement. They were passing by some gaily-lighted building, and she saw that his face was white and haggard, his lips under his heavy moustache were quivering painfully; he had the look of a man to whom sleep had long been a stranger.

"I will forget everything, Adela," he went on in low shaking tones. "The past months shall be as though they had never been. Ah, do not look at me with that horror in your eyes! My wife, have pity; you are breaking my heart!"

Nina was so struck by the passionate earnestness of his manner, by the unmistakable anguish that vibrated in his deep voice, that she checked her sobs and sat up. A new fear took possession of her, and thrilled her very soul. This man was *mad*!—there could be no doubt of it; and she was entirely in his power! For a second or two she sat almost paralyzed. Then even in her sick terror she became suddenly conscious that she must not show him she was afraid of him; so she said as quietly as she could, though her heart was beating like a steam-hammer:

"I think you mistake me for some one else. I——"

"Dear," he replied with anxious tenderness, "you know, during your illness you—you forget many things. By-and-by, when you are—quite strong again, you will know—you will understand how terribly your cold words, your averted looks wound me; how——"

His voice faltered; he stopped, and Nina felt that the arm which still half-encircled her waist was trembling

violently. They were crossing Oxford Street, she noted despairingly. In an incredibly short time they would be at St. Pancras, whither she had a confused recollection of hearing him direct the cabman. *Where* was he going to take her? With the desperation of despair, she rapidly evolved a plan. She would no longer deny that she was his wife, lest he should break into frenzy, and become unmanageable, but humour him until they reached the station. Then surely she would find some one to help her, some means of escape. So rallying all her powers of dissimulation, she looked up at him, and said gently and wonderingly:

"Ah—I have been ill, then? I am better now. But—I seem confused. I—I do not remember——"

"Ah, my darling," he returned eagerly, "I hoped, I knew, when I *saw* your tears, bitter as they were to me, *that* the clouds that have separated us so long were rolling away from your mind. And now tell me," he went on, evidently controlling his voice with difficulty, "where have you been all these weary days and nights? Had you money? Had you—Heavens! do you know how the thought has maddened me?—how——"

"I will tell you everything—afterwards," she interrupted him hurriedly, noticing the growing excitement in his tone. "Only forgive me. You know I was ill, and——and——"

"Yes, yes, I will forgive everything; I swear it. But ah! little one, why did you harbour such cruel thoughts of me—say such cruel words? Was it that—that you were *jealous*? Forgive me, dear, but your words before—before your illness—they seemed to imply——"

"Yes, yes," she answered hastily, "that was it. I—I was jealous."

"My darling," venturing to hold her a little closer, "of whom? Not—not of Alice, surely?"

"Yes, of Alice," she muttered, trusting she might be forgiven the awful lies she was uttering.

"Oh, Adela!" he went on in a voice which shook, in spite of his apparent efforts to keep it calm and steady, "how *could* you?"

Nina shivered involuntarily, and felt herself a criminal of the deepest dye.

"My wife," he continued, with an inexpressible softening of the voice, "do not start away from me. I will ask you no more questions. No one shall. It shall be as though you had never been away. You will find everything as you left it, except—that Alice has gone. And we will forget, my Adela, that this trouble has ever come between us."

In spite of all her terror and bewilderment, Nina felt strangely touched, and a feeling of deep pity took the place of anger in her heart.

"You will not leave me again, my child?" he said still with that strong restraint in his tone.

"No—oh, no," Nina hastened to reply, with a duplicity of which an hour ago she would not have deemed herself capable. For uncompromising truthfulness was one of Miss Ferrers' idiosyncrasies in general. But, in dealing with a lunatic, the sternest moralist slackens the chain a little.

"Promise me," he whispered. "Say 'Geoffrey, I promise.'"

"Geoffrey, I—I promise," she murmured.

"*Swear* it," he continued hoarsely.

Nina had not contemplated this, but a moment's *thought* supplied a Jesuitical answer.

"I swear," she said in trembling tones, "that I will never leave my dear husband again."

"Ah, my darling," he breathed, with a sudden tightening of his arm round her.

(Heavens! she thought in terror, was he going to *kiss* her?)

"On one condition," she said calmly, but with a wildly beating heart.

"Yes, darling, anything." But the next moment he bent his head to hers, his moustache brushed her cheek, his lips touched hers.

"Oh, *don't!*" she exclaimed in an agony of shame and terror, putting up her hands to her face.

"Your condition—what is it?" he said unsteadily.

"That you—that you take away your arm." (His arm was instantly removed.) "And that you do not—do not kiss me again—until we get home."

"Is my touch so hateful to you—still?" he said bitterly.

"No, no," Nina hastened to say. "But I—I am nervous, and——"

"True," he interrupted her; "it shall be as you wish."

And throwing himself back in his seat, he covered his eyes with his hand.

"Oh, child," he muttered, "if you *knew* how I have suffered—if you *knew!*"

There was a short silence. They were driving through Gordon Square. A few minutes more and they would be at the station. She felt curiously calm now, and self-reliant. As they passed under a lamp, she stole a look at her companion's face. His hand still covered his eyes; he was gnawing his under-lip fiercely. He looked so ill,

so miserable, that Nina, as before, felt a strange compassion mingling with her fear of this dangerously good-looking lunatic. Poor fellow! what a pity it seemed! She wondered what had deprived him of reason. Perhaps his wife was dead, or had left him, and his diseased brain conjured up her likeness in every woman he met. Geoffrey—his name was. Geoffrey what? His manner, voice, bearing, all proclaimed him in every sense of the word a gentleman. Here she became aware that the subject of her thoughts had moved slightly, and was regarding her steadily with a pair of very expressive dark eyes, full of a half-wistful tenderness, and certainly looking sane enough just now. She had been gazed at scores of times, by scores of lovers' eyes with less of sanity in them. But, she remembered shuddering, the worst of madmen were cunning enough at times to look perfectly sensible. Perhaps he had murdered this poor Adela, this wife of his, whom he seemed to have loved so passionately. Ah, what a terrible lottery is marriage! she reflected. She turned her head away, for his eyes seemed to thrill her as no other eyes had ever done. He was not too mad, evidently, to keep his promises; for he neither attempted to put his arm round her again nor to kiss her, for which she was intensely thankful.

"I can scarcely believe that I have found you again," he said, taking her hand in his, and speaking with an odd catch in his voice; "that all the agony, the uncertainty, is over. It seems as though it must be a dream."

Poor Nina devoutly wished it had been a dream.

"Do you know I intended leaving England to-morrow?" he went on, holding her hand very tightly.

"Ah, if you had only left it to-day!" thought Miss

ers.

But she only murmured, "Yes?"

They were driving into the station now.

"Adela," went on the unhappy Geoffrey, "you will try to love me again?"

"Yes, oh, yes," replied Nina, with ready mendacity.

The hansom stopped with a jerk, and the girl's heart beat as her companion lifted her out. Should she try to get away *now*? she thought, as he turned to pay the cabman. No; he was watching her furtively and anxiously. Should she implore assistance from some benevolent stranger? No; he would simply claim her as his wife in that calm, lordly way as before, and no one would believe her. She must wait. So she walked quietly by his side until they emerged on to the platform. Her companion, who certainly managed to look sane enough at times, looked at his watch.

"We do not start for ten minutes," he said, "but we had better secure an empty compartment."

"Where are you going to take me?" she faltered.

"Home," he answered, looking at her searchingly; "where should I take you?" Then quickly, "Unless—would you rather remain in town to-night?"

"No, oh, no."

Nina's heart sank as they stopped before an empty carriage, and the obsequiously following porter flung open the door.

"No luggage," said Geoffrey curtly, waving him aside.

Then to Nina, hurriedly and anxiously:

"My darling, how pale you look, and how you are trembling! Let me bring you a glass of sherry, or a cup of tea, or something?"

"Yes, please, a cup of tea," gasped Nina, as she took her seat, her heart leaping to her mouth.

But he lingered.

"You need not be alarmed—er—Geoffrey," said Nina, smiling spasmodically and deceitfully into his anxious face. "You are afraid that I—I am going to run away from you, are you not?"

A dark flush rose to his brow, then receded again.

"Have I not reason to be afraid?" he said in a low voice.

"And have I not *promised*?" returned Nina, half-hysterically. "Can you not trust me?"

"Yes, my dearest," he replied. Then a little wistfully, "You—would not deceive me?"

"Ah, Geoffrey!" in reproachful tones.

"Forgive me," he said hastily. "I know you would not. Your word is sufficient."

Nina's heart smote her, but she only said:

"I hope so."

He hesitated a moment; then he went away. As Nina watched him along the platform she could not help noticing, even in her feverish impatience, what a fine-looking man he was; and certainly, mad or not, he would make a most attentive husband. In a few seconds she saw him disappear into the refreshment-room, and the next instant she had jumped out of the carriage, and was speeding swiftly along the platform, with limbs that trembled so that she could scarcely drag them along, in spite of her agony of terror. More than once she looked fearfully over her shoulder; but the tall form of her dreaded captor was nowhere to be seen—as yet. She crossed the entrance hall, and reached the line of waiting cabs. Then she looked back once more. No, he was not in sight.

"Cab, miss?" said the driver of the nearest hansom.

"Yes. Layton Gardens, South Kensington," she panted, her heart beating almost to suffocation. "Drive fast!" she went on hurriedly, as she scrambled into the vehicle, "as fast as you can."

"All right, miss."

The man whipped up his horse, and the station was soon left far behind. The horse went well, but he seemed to Nina the slowest of his kind; every slight block, every momentary stoppage, was a keen agony to the trembling girl; her strained ears and eyes seemed to conjure up pursuit in every shout, in every passing vehicle; her dreaded captor's voice seemed to sound in her ears, the haunting penetrating gaze of his eyes to meet her on every side. At last, with an inexpressible sense of relief, she saw that the hansom had turned into the Brompton Road. She breathed more freely; but not until she had reached Layton Gardens, and knocked wildly at her aunt's door, did she feel any degree of security. She rushed past the astonished page, almost fell upstairs, then, her room gained, she locked the door, as though dreading she might not be safe even there, and burst into a storm of tears and sobs.

"Well, Nina, you little will-'o-the-wisp, so I have really got you at last. I had begun to think that your promises, like lovers' vows and pie-crust, were only made to be broken."

The speaker was Mrs. George Chillingly, dark-eyed, vivacious, and on the sunny side of thirty. Her companion was Nina Ferrers. They were seated in the cosy inner drawing-room at Chillingly, in affectionate prox-

imity to a roaring fire. The time of year was January; the time of day was five o'clock P.M.

Although nearly two years had elapsed since Nina's extraordinary adventure, she had kept the experiences of that February night a profound secret. Not even to Aunt Jane had she confided her "narrow escape." For months afterwards she had scarcely dared to go out alone, so great was her terror of again meeting and being captured by the unhappy man who suffered from so strange a delusion. But I am obliged to confess that she thought of him much more frequently than Aunt Jane would have approved, or indeed than she entirely approved herself. And, to Aunt Lavinia's indignation, she had sent five more suitors—all eligible—disconsolate away, and announced her fixed and unalterable intention of living and dying a spinster.

She had arrived at Chillingly only an hour ago, on a month's visit to her old friend and schoolfellow, Janet Foster, now Mrs. Chillingly.

"I thought we were never going to see you again," said the latter lady, stirring the fire vigorously. "And now that you have come, I want you to make yourself specially charming—even more charming than usual, I mean."

"Why?" smiled Nina, idly waving an elaborate fire-screen to and fro. "Have you any one particular staying here?"

"Only Colonel Lorimer just now. You have met *him* often enough. He and George are out murdering innocent little birds. I expect them in every moment. But it is not for either of *them* that you are to do the seductive, my dear. We expect a certain Mr. Beresford

to-night—a new chum of George's. They met last autumn somewhere in Scotland, and George took a great fancy to him. I can't say he is exactly the kind of man *I* like. He came for a few days in November, and I felt as if I were at a funeral the whole time. He is, well—er—peculiar, very reserved, and melancholy, and *difficile* generally. So I want *you* to take him in hand."

"Thanks, very much," yawned Nina, "you are very kind; but I don't think I care about peculiar, reserved, melancholy, *difficile* men. I'm getting too old to exert myself by drawing them out. I prefer them ordinary, confidential, gay, and easy."

"Oh no, you don't. You always *can* charm into geniality those taciturn beings who are sphinxes to everybody else. Besides you *must*, because he is going to stay for weeks, and I could do nothing with him. George and Colonel Lorimer will spend the evenings in tearing old Gladstone to pieces, and discussing the Irish question until they are black in the face, as usual, and Mr Beresford will sit silent, with a face expressive of utter indifference as to whether England is governed by a hypocrite, or a fool, or a mountebank, or not governed at all; so *you* must burst like a revelation upon this iceberg, and—thaw him! Besides, he has a splendid estate down in Staffordshire—Cardew, it is called—and is enormously wealthy. Ah, here comes Brookes with tea. Bring the table to the fire, Brookes. You don't take sugar, Nina? No, I thought not."

"Is this Mr. Beresford young, then? Is he handsome? Or is he neither?" inquired Nina languidly, when the man had left the room.

"Oh, he is considerably over thirty, I should say. As

to looks, he has rather a nice face, if he would only look a little less as if he wished he and everybody else were *dead*. He has the most extraordinary eyes, by the way ; *mesmeric* eyes—quite. But after all, poor fellow, it is no wonder he looks gloomy ; his is a most painful story."

"What kind of story?" said Nina, taking a rapid and exhaustive view of the cake-basket as she spoke. "A *decent* story, I trust?"

"Oh yes, quite ; at least I believe so. I only know the mere outline. George told me (in confidence, of course), and you know the *scrappy* way men always dole out anything one particularly wants to know. But, good gracious, I must go and see if Macpherson has sent in enough flowers ; he is the stingiest old creature. I had no idea it was so late. Now be sure you look your loveliest to-night, Nina *mie*. Oh yes, I know you have taken vows of celibacy. But I don't want you to *marry* the man—you couldn't if you tried ; I only want you to entertain him, and waken him up a bit." And Mrs. Chillingly rustled away.

Nina did look very lovely as she stepped softly across the hall about an hour before dinner. She wore a quaintly-made gown of some curious grey shade—a colour which would have been trying, probably, to most women, but which was eminently becoming to her. Her thick brown hair was piled loosely on the top of her pretty head ; her cheeks were clearly, softly pink ; her eyes dangerously dark and sweet.

She crossed the long drawing-room, which was empty, and parted the heavy curtains which divided it from the inner room. Then she paused, one arm slightly raised, her head bent a little forward.

The room was lighted only by the fire, and a single lamp which burned on a distant table. Standing on the hearth-rug, looking down into the flickering flames, and leaning one elbow on the mantelpiece, was a tall, rather military-looking man, with close-cropped, iron-grey hair. It was not Mr. Chillingly; it was not Colonel Lorimer; therefore it must be the *difficile* stranger, Mr. Beresford.

The brass rings of the curtains rattled slightly. At the sound he turned, and Nina saw a pale, weary-looking face, with piercing deep-set eyes, and a stern, sad mouth, half hidden by a brown moustache. As his eyes met Nina's, a ghastly pallor overspread his features.

"Merciful Heaven!" he articulated in low, intense tones.

Nina *felt* the colour leave her cheeks. *Where* had she seen that face, heard that voice, looked into those eyes before? She advanced a few steps into the room, then stood motionless, silent, terrified. He stood quite still also, his hand grasping the back of a chair, his breath coming short and quick, his face white as death.

"It is true, then!" he muttered, speaking seemingly half to himself, and with a quiver of mingled awe and rapture in his deep voice (Nina remembered the voice so well). "It is true, then—the dead *may* return?"

He came nearer—he held out his arms towards her.

"*Adela!*" he whispered, in a voice that shook with half-incredulous ecstasy. "*Adela, speak to me!*"

Some uncontrollable, irresistible impulse—influence—what you will—for which she could never afterwards account, impelled her answer.

"*Geoffrey!*" she breathed, in low, almost inaudible tones.

A fierce, sudden light leaped into his eyes.

"Ah, my darling! my wife!" he panted, still in that passionate whisper. "Why have you come? Is it to tell me that my long, weary waiting is over at last—that my days on earth are done—that we shall be together, you and I, for all *eternity*?"

He came nearer still. In the dim, uncertain light his eyes seemed to burn into hers. A spell seemed over her, which she could not have broken had her life been the forfeit. She tried to call out, but no cry would come. He was close to her now; she felt his breath on her cheek. In another moment she was in his arms—held close to his heart. But it was only for one brief second. With a short, sharp exclamation he released her, and staggered back. His expression changed rapidly, and he sank into a chair, his powerful frame trembling as a woman's might have done.

Freed from the magnetic gaze of his eyes, Nina recovered herself instantly, and, noting his extreme pallor, she advanced quickly towards him and laid her hand on his arm.

"You are ill," she said hastily, forgetting her fears for the moment.

"No, no," he muttered, waving her away. "Go—leave me."

Then in hoarse, exhausted tones he continued:

"In Heaven's name, who or what are you, who thus
——"

He stopped and rose to his feet, leaning his hand heavily on a table near him. For a second or two he stood looking down at her agitated face, to which the colour was slowly returning. A strange expression, not

disappointment, not relief, not mortification, and yet a mingling of all three, rested on his features.

"Pray pardon me," he said, evidently speaking with an effort, and as though he hardly knew what he said. "Pray accept my apologies, and excuse me. I—I am ill."

And, putting one hand confusedly to his head, he crossed the room, hastily parted the curtains, and was gone.

Nina sank into a chair, trembling in every limb. What extraordinary fate had brought her and this unhappy man under the same roof? Did Janet *know* that she had a raving lunatic for an inmate of her peaceful home? Evidently not, for she sailed into the room at this moment, looking as bright and brisk as possible.

"All alone, Nina? I thought the colonel would have been down. Child, how cold and pale you look! Come closer to the fire. George is not nearly ready yet, and Mr. Beresford has only just gone upstairs. How wretchedly ill he is looking. By the way, I was going to tell you about him." She drew a chair close to the fender, and, holding out a slender foot to the fire, went on, "He is a widower, I forgot to tell you. He married a very pretty American girl, and they adored each other. When they had been married about a year they had a son, and Mrs. Beresford was never the same after the child was born. I don't know if she was *mad*, but she was next door to it. The baby died when it was only two months old; and she grew worse. Sometimes she was morbidly depressed, sometimes irritable to frenzy. She developed a singular jealousy of Mr. Beresford's cousin, a Miss Scott, who lived with them, and accused the poor fellow

—who had no eyes for any one but his wife—of being in love with this cousin, and all sorts of things. At last she would not speak to her husband at all, seemed to take a dislike to him, and at times did not even seem to know him. He would not hear of having her put under restraint, for the doctors gave him hope that by-and-by she might recover her reason. So things went on in this terrible way for some months, until one night, about two years ago, she disappeared. Poor Beresford was almost like a madman himself, for he absolutely worshipped her. He followed up all possible and impossible clues, but in vain. He was just going to sail for America, when he was taken ill with brain fever in a hotel in London. Well,” lowering her voice, “they need not have looked so far from home, for—some months afterwards—” here Janet stopped and shuddered—“they found her body in a large pond in a lonely part of the grounds at Cardew. She had evidently either fallen in or committed suicide, poor young thing. They say he has been almost melancholy mad ever since. He is certainly *queer*. Why, Nina, how you are trembling! I didn’t know you were so tender-hearted.”

Just then the Vicar with his wife and daughter were announced, followed almost immediately by Mr. Chillingly and Colonel Lorimer. The latter, who was an old friend of Nina’s, took a seat near her, and entered into a low-toned conversation, in which, however, she took but little part. A horrible doubt—impression—conviction—was slowly developing in her mind, one which she could scarcely put into shape, and yet which grew stronger every moment. Her answers to the gallant colonel’s remarks became more and more wildly wide of the mark,

happily, the gong sounded for dinner.

"Where's Beresford?" said the host, for the second time.

As the words left his lips Mr. Beresford entered, calm, self-possessed, but deadly pale. As Mrs. Chillingly introduced him to Nina, he started visibly; a half-incredulous, half-pained expression flitted over his face, but it was gone in a moment. He bowed silently, and, in obedience to a laughing command from his hostess, offered Nina his arm, and they all went in to dinner.

Certainly he was a novelty in the way of dinner companions, for he only addressed her once, voluntarily, during the whole of the meal, and then it was to say in low though abrupt tones:

"Pardon me, am I right in understanding that your name is—*Ferrers*?"

"Yes," she answered, feeling horribly uncomfortable and nervous.

"Strange!" he murmured, half to himself—"very strange!"

He let his eyes rest for a moment on hers, then turned them hastily aside.

"I do not see why it should be!" returned Nina, rather haughtily.

"I beg your pardon," he said mechanically. Then he leaned back in his chair and absently fingered the stem of his hock-glass. He ate scarcely anything, she noticed, though he drank a good deal.

Queer, Janet had said he was. Most decidedly queer! Miss Ferrers gave an almost audible gasp of relief when her hostess rose to leave the room.

Mr. Beresford's conduct was not less eccentric when he entered the drawing-room. He at once crossed the

room to where Nina was seated at the piano, at some little distance from the rest of the party. He did not speak to her, but seated himself in a low chair a little way behind her, so that she could not see him without turning her head. She was playing some dreamy melody of Schubert's, and as her fingers wandered over the keys, she *felt*, though she could not see, that his eyes were bent upon her steadily.

Presently he leaned forward.

"Miss Ferrers," he said in a very low voice, "will you come into the conservatory with me for a few moments?"

She played several bars before she answered; then turning her eyes unwillingly to meet his, said somewhat nervously:

"Yes, if you wish it."

They passed into the semi-dusk of the half-lit conservatory, and Nina sat down on a green wire bench near a fragrant flowering shrub whose starry blossoms gleamed palely through the gloom. Beresford leaned his back against one of the slender iron columns which supported the building. He was silent for a short time; then he said abruptly:

"I owe you some apology, Miss Ferrers, for what must have seemed either idiotic folly on my part, or unwarrantable insolence. *This*," after a pause, "must be my excuse."

As he spoke he detached from his watch-chain a small locket, opened it, and—after looking at it for a few moments hungrily, passionately—held it towards Nina.

She bent forward, and as her eyes fell upon the delicately tinted ivory miniature it contained, she could not repress an astonished, half-indignant exclamation.

It might have been her own portrait!

His eyes met hers again.

"It is my wife!" he said, and his voice was unsteady ;
"my dead wife!"

Nina gazed at the miniature stupidly. The resemblance was almost startling. But after a closer inspection it grew fainter. Nina's hair was dark ; the hair of the pictured girl was auburn. Nina's eyes were brown ; the other's dark blue. The mouth, too, was different ; and, above all, the expression.

"You see the likeness—to yourself?" said Beresford briefly.

"Yes ; oh, yes."

"Then can you understand what a shock it was to me to-night, when I saw you enter the room in the dim light? I—I had been thinking of—*her*. You can, perhaps, forgive me?"

"Oh, yes, yes," she murmured again.

"And yet," he went on, looking at her steadily, "I could have *sworn* you called me by my name!"

Nina became very pale. Beresford seated himself beside her, and went on in carefully repressed tones :

"My wife's name was also Ferrers—and you are her living image. It is strange—more than strange. Surely nothing but the tie of blood could account for such a likeness? Have you any relatives in America? I met my wife there, and we were married there." His features contracted sharply.

"Yes," faltered Nina, "I believe I have cousins in America."

"Of the same name—Ferrers?"

"Yes," said Miss Ferrers again, feeling angrily conscious that she had been behaving like a shy, timid school-girl during the entire evening.

"In New York?"

"Yes."

"Then you and—my late wife must have been cousins."

"I do not know. I never saw my American cousins. But as you say there is such a likeness, I suppose—I—— Mr. Beresford, I must go—the heat—I feel faint."

"Allow me to fan you," he said quietly; and as he took up the fan which lay in her lap, she saw that his hand shook. She leaned back and closed her eyes for a moment. When she looked up again she met his gaze bent upon her, steadily, piercingly.

"We have met before, Miss Ferrers," he went on in clear, cold tones.

"Met before?" she echoed faintly.

"Yes. To-night was the second occasion, if my memory serves me, upon which I have had the honour of playing the fool in your presence."

"I—I don't understand you," she faltered.

"You will pardon me—you do understand me. You cannot have forgotten, I think, how unpardonably I annoyed and insulted you one February night two years ago! I need not, I am sure," haughtily, "further recall the circumstance to your memory. However insignificant my individuality may be, I flatter myself that such besotted, drivelling idiocy as I displayed upon that occasion could not fail to be remembered. It must have been a most entertaining experience for you, I imagine."

"Oh! *don't!*" uttered poor Nina.

"It was scarcely, however, so entertaining for me," he went on bitterly. "I acted madly, unpardonably; but I had *some* excuse; you had none. You know my story.

At least," with a short laugh, "as Chillingly knows it, and, as you are his wife's bosom friend, I conclude you do. I was half crazed at that time by my poor wife's disappearance. Your extraordinary likeness to her—your voice—your words——"

He stopped. Nina sat pale and trembling. She remembered too well her words—*his* words; the touch of his arm, of his lips!

"If I was half mad before, I think I was wholly so when I found that, as I thought, I had *again* lost her—my poor wife! Let me entreat you, Miss Ferrers," he continued, breathing hard and with difficulty, "in future, when you feel inclined for practical joking, take care who your victims are. Your heartless jest that night almost cost me my reason."

"*Jest!*" she returned indignantly. "Is it possible you think me capable of—of——" And here, I regret exceedingly to state, Miss Ferrers burst into angry, hysterical tears.

Her companion looked perfectly aghast.

"Miss Ferrers!" he exclaimed in extreme agitation.

She checked her sobs with a mighty effort.

"Don't speak to me!" she replied in a voice quivering with indignation. "How *dare* you! It is *you* who ought to be ashamed of your behaviour that night. Nothing was further from my thoughts than *jesting*; I can assure you. I thought you were some dangerous *madman*! What was I to do? You would not listen to my entreaties; you *know* you would not. The only way of escape I could see was to humour you——" Here an unruly sob checked her utterance.

"Pray, calm yourself," he said in a low voice. "I was

unjust. I see—I feel—that my mad folly alone was to blame. Forgive me—do forgive me!” He took her hand as he spoke, and looked at her with contrite and anxious eyes.

“I will *never* forgive you!” she returned passionately, snatching away her hand and rising to her feet. He rose also, looking pale and agitated.

At this moment Mrs. Chillingly entered the conservatory.

“Nina, we want you to sing——” she began, then stopped, as she noted her friend’s crimson cheeks and wet, flashing eyes, and observed with amazement the changed aspect of the usually stern and indifferent Beresford.

“Miss Ferrers and I have just discovered that we are distant cousins,” said Beresford gravely, seeing his hostess’s surprised air.

“*Cousins!*” she echoed. “How very charming! Why Nina——”

But Miss Ferrers had disappeared.

How Mr. Beresford made his peace with his newly discovered relative neither very well knew. They had no formal reconciliation; but during the days which followed they appeared to mutually bury the hatchet, and to drift into a calm *bonne camaraderie* which seemed eminently satisfactory to both. Not seldom Beresford talked to her of his dead wife. She listened sympathetically, and with her clear, wholesome good sense swept away much of what was morbid in his sorrow; nay, even lessened the sorrow itself. But there was nothing sentimental, let me tell you, in this good fellowship. Plato himself would have viewed it with grim approval.

Their convictions, it appeared, were identical regarding many subjects. They just differed enough to give piquancy to their discussions. Both agreed that love was a folly, and matrimony a mistake. Nina's view was that, *whoever* one married, one was safe before six months to wish oneself single again. Beresford only differed from her so far as to incline to the somewhat morbid belief that the more passionately one loved, the more certain the beloved object was to change or to die. Therefore it was clear to both that men and women were happier unwed. Nina considered, too, that woman's sphere of usefulness was narrowed by the duties of domestic life; Beresford, that men were fools to allow one passion so to enslave the heart and the senses as to stake all their chances of happiness on possessing the love of any one woman. Thus both were calmly superior to the tender passion; the woman because she had never felt its power, the man—because he *had*. So at the end of a month they parted, each feeling that they had laid the foundation of a valuable, sensible, lifelong friendship.

Having explained the above facts, I will leave it to my readers to explain what followed.

A year and a half had passed. Two men were standing, one hot June night, in the curtained doorway of a fashionably crowded ball-room in Mayfair.

"By Jove!" said the lesser and fairer of the two, "there's Beresford. How fit he looks, to be sure! When I last heard of him he was doing the broken-hearted recluse—melancholy mad, and all that sort of thing. He doesn't answer to either description just now. And I say, Harcourt, what a pretty woman he is talking to! Who is she? Do you know her?"

The individual addressed as Harcourt turned his head languidly, and fixed his eyeglass more firmly in his sleepy left eye.

"What a fellow you are to talk, Kerr!" he said in slow expostulatory tones. "Where? Don't see Beresford at all."

"There, man, just opposite, talking to the woman in white and gold. By Jove, what a smile she gave him there! Wish she'd look at *me* like that."

Harcourt's gaze travelled slowly round the room until it alighted on the lady in question, who certainly *was* a remarkably pretty woman, even in that assemblage, where pretty women were the rule and not the exception.

"Oh, that's his wife, don't you know?" he said with an air of lazy surprise.

"His *wife*!—Beresford's wife! Pooh! my dear fellow, you are raving. His wife has been dead for the last three years and more. She died just before I went out to Jamaica."

"Granted," returned the other tranquilly. "But the law has yet to be passed, so far as I know, which denounces second marriages as illegal."

"The deuce! Then he has married again?"

"Exactly."

"Well! you surprise me. You remember how awfully cut up he seemed after his first wife's death? We thought he was off his head. I never saw her, but I always understood she was wonderfully good-looking. By Jove! the fellow has taste. Who was she—number two, I mean?"

"What a bore you are, Kerr! She was a Miss Ferrers,

a cousin of his first wife, I believe ; and only that she is a little darker and has different coloured eyes, she is almost the image of her predecessor."

"You don't say so! 'The prescription as before?' Well, it seems to have worked a wonderful cure. Upon my word, some fellows always manage to get the best of everything. You don't suppose she has another cousin, now?—or a sister, eh? Ah, I was afraid not. By *Jove*, she is a pretty woman! Introduce me, will you?"



the fact that the *Chlorophyll* content of the leaves was not significantly different from that of the control group. This suggests that the treatment did not have a significant effect on the chlorophyll content of the leaves. The results of the experiment suggest that the treatment had a significant effect on the growth of the plants, but not on the chlorophyll content of the leaves. This is likely due to the fact that the treatment was applied to the roots of the plants, and not to the leaves. The chlorophyll content of the leaves is primarily determined by the amount of light that the leaves receive, and not by the amount of water or nutrients that the roots receive. Therefore, the treatment had no significant effect on the chlorophyll content of the leaves.

Figure 1. Growth of plants treated with 100 mg/L of the treatment.

Figure 1 shows the growth of plants treated with 100 mg/L of the treatment. The plants were grown in a controlled environment, and the results show that the treatment had a significant effect on the growth of the plants. The plants treated with the treatment showed a significant increase in height and leaf area compared to the control group. This suggests that the treatment had a positive effect on the growth of the plants.

IN THE CITY'S HEART.



IN THE CITY'S HEART.

"And all they knew of London was its shadow."—*Bulwer Lytton.*

THE neighbourhood of Blackfriars Road is not a particularly pleasant locality, so far as I am aware. It is certainly neither a fashionable nor an aristocratic quarter of the great city. But on the other hand, neither is it expensive as regards lodgings and living in general; and it was on account of this last qualification that Dick Conyers and his little brother had lived there for the last two years. They occupied a couple of small top-storey rooms in a dingy street (which I shall call Lark Street), somewhat back from the main thoroughfare; and they were evidently not too well off, even by the Lark Street standard, which was not high. They seemed to have no friends; certainly they had no visitors, and but few letters; but Dick and Robin wanted no other companionship while they had each other, apparently, in spite of the great difference in their ages. Robin was a slimly-built little fellow, shrewd and thoughtful far beyond his years, which as yet numbered but seven. He had small, pale features, with bright ques-

tioning grey eyes, and thick, fair hair, which seemed to spring from a deep central whirlpool on the top of his compact little head, and hung evenly down all round. Between Dick and Robin there were fifteen years. In other words, Dick was twenty-two. He had a kind, manly face, with heavily-lashed grey eyes some shades darker than Robin's. It was a clever face, too, with a scornful look about the mouth at times, which curiously belied the deep, earnest eyes. Robin thought him the finest-looking fellow in the world. Certainly he compared more than favourably with the other inhabitants of Lark Street, which was Robin's world in the meantime. But then, as Dick's landlady, Mrs. Croll, was wont to inform her bosom friends over sociable cups of tea: "The top floor is real gentry, though gives next to no trouble; and pays reglar as the clock, though as poor as poor, and sometimes doesn't see butcher-meat from one week's end to another. And," shaking her head mysteriously, "it's my impression 'as 'ow the poor dear young gentleman isn't long for this world, for he do cough most frightful and gets wasteder-looking every day. And keeps scribbling away till all hours at them silly papers, though not much he gets for 'em, I'll be bound. I just took a peep at some of them one day when he and the little 'un was out, and neither head nor tail of 'em could I make, though to be sure I'm no scholar, when all's said and done."

So far Mrs. Croll was certainly right; Dick and Robin *were* of a markedly different class from her other lodgers, and Dick *had* a troublesome cough, and *did* work very hard. But he got more for his "scribblings" than his landlady supposed, inasmuch as what he made by this

work was all the brothers had to live upon. Sometimes it was little enough, though, and Dick's heart grew heavy, often, as he thought of the future, and of Robin.

As I have said, they had lived for two years in Lark Street. In their father's lifetime they had lived in a more refined, and consequently a more expensive district; but as Mr. Conyers—himself a struggling author—had many debts, and scanty means of paying them, the money which remained to his sons at his death was not considerable. They were motherless as well as fatherless, for Mrs. Conyers had died when Robin was born. Dick inherited his father's talent, and had no fear of failure in the profession he had chosen, though well aware that literary success is a work of time, a goal to which there is no royal road. A first-class education was the only legacy—and one not to be despised—left by Mr. Conyers to his eldest son, and Dick having a good memory, a keen imaginative faculty, and a fluent, forcible way of handling his subject, whatever it might be, bid fair to realize his hopes of success and to make no inconsiderable name in literature. But like most young authors, he had not a little difficulty in getting his articles accepted by the various magazines, and those editors who did graciously permit him to appear in their pages, did not overburden him with monetary remuneration.

Dick had never been a robust fellow, but this last winter had tried him sorely, and a cold he had caught one snowy day in early spring still clung about him persistently.

On a quiet May evening the brothers were sitting at the open window of the very limited apartment which

served them as a sitting-room. It was a *very* small room, until compared with the box-like bedroom opening off it, which latter was lighted by a skylight in the roof, and had the doubtful advantage of being stiflingly hot in summer and freezingly cold in winter. The window of the larger room overlooked the noisy street below, and Robin's chief amusement, when his brother was too busy to talk to him, was to sit at this window and watch the never-ending traffic, the occasional street fights, and the frequent feminine brawls which enlivened Lark Street. Right opposite there was a small fruit shop, kept by an old woman of vinegary aspect and keen, hawk-like eyes. Robin used to feel a curious awe of this old woman. She reminded him of a certain gruesome picture of a witch, which graced the pages of one of the few picture-books he possessed. He always clutched Dick's hand firmly when they passed this shop; not that he was afraid, he would assure himself valiantly, but—perhaps she really *was* a witch! The window had other attractions, too, for in the very next window there hung a battered, dingy cage, which held—as an unlovely body sometimes holds a beautiful soul—a little bullfinch, which discoursed such sweet, heart-stirring music that Robin used to close his eyes and try to fancy himself in heaven. He felt sure the voices of the angels could not be sweeter. The bird knew Robin quite well, and when the boy leaned out of the window and chirped to it in his shrill little treble, it would hop to the side of the cage and chirp back to him in the most friendly manner possible. Lastly, on the window-sill Robin had a pot of musk, fragrant and healthy. Dick had bought it for him last summer, and the child tended it and watched it with

loving, anxious care. He took it in every night, lest some gust of wind or some prowling cat should knock it over, and proudly called it his "flower-garden."

To-night Dick's cough was very bad indeed, and stooping seemed to aggravate it; so he was, for a wonder, idle. Robin was leaning a little way out of the window; the bullfinch was singing a sleepy song before retiring for the night; a soft breeze blew the odour of the musk into the room and filled it with fragrance. It was Saturday night, and the street was already becoming aggressively lively and crowded. Two costermongers were engaged in a vituperative contest over their barrows; the "witch-woman" of the fruit shop, with shrill unwomanly invectives, was soundly cuffing a little ragged urchin who had, believing himself unseen, abstracted no less than three rosy-cheeked apples from the wicker basket at the shop door. Robin looked on with breathless interest until the culprit, having been thus summarily tried, condemned, and punished, had run off howling round the corner. Then Robin drew himself in slowly.

"I say, Dick," he said, in his clear fresh little voice, "I say, Dick, tell me about our grandfather. You said you would, you know, first time you weren't busy." Dick laid down the book he was reading, and leaning his elbow on the window-sill, gazed out dreamily at the bit of blue sky visible over the tops of the opposite houses.

"Is he dead?" asked Robin soberly, as his brother did not answer.

"No, I don't think so," answered the other. "He may be, though."

"Then why doesn't he come to see us if he isn't

dead?" pursued the child, resting his head on his hands.

"He and father quarrelled, I believe, when father married our mother," replied Dick slowly. "He is a proud old man, and mother was poor. So he was angry, and they never spoke to each other again."

"But lots of nice people are poor, aren't they?" asked Robin, looking mystified. "People wouldn't be if they could help it. *We* are poor."

"Exactly," answered his brother bitterly, speaking more to himself than to the child; "and that is why we must never presume to remind our grandfather that we exist."

"Would he come to see us if we were rich?" inquired Robin, gently blowing some specks of dust off the leaves of his beloved musk-plant.

"Oh, yes, I suppose he would," Dick replied, with a cynical look that sat strangely on his young face. "That would be a different story. When you are rich and don't want any particular kindness shown you, every one *will* be kind to you. But when you are poor you may starve, little one, and they will never come near you or care whether you are dead or alive."

Robin meditated for a few minutes, then said:

"I say, grandfather must be a precious old sneak, mustn't he?"

Dick did not reply. It was very seldom that such bitter words fell from his lips, but to-day had been the anniversary of his father's death, and he remembered, with a fierce resentment, how earnestly the dying man in a few half-illegible pencilled words had begged old Mr. Conyers to come to him then, to bridge over the long

silence and estrangement which had parted them. But his pleadings had been disregarded, and he had died without his father's forgiveness. Dick had felt bitterly towards his grandfather then ; he felt more so now, but he rarely spoke of him. He had visions, this ambitious, haughty Dick, of becoming famous, world-renowned, and in his turn scorning the stern, hard old man who had embittered his adored father's last hours and had dared to speak of his sweet gentle mother as no fitting mate for a gentleman and a Conyers.

"Everybody isn't cruel to poor people, though," observed Robin, after a pause. "There's Mrs. Croll, now. See how kind she was to me when I had measles, and made gruel and poultices for you when the pain in your side was so bad. And only yesterday she gave me an apple."

"Quite right, Rob," returned Dick hastily. "I spoke unjustly. There is plenty of kindness in the world, I daresay. But one is apt to lose sight of it at times."

"And then, you know," gravely pursued Robin, feeling himself suddenly raised to the honourable position of counsellor, "grandfather may want to come all the time, and not know where we are."

Dick shook his head doubtfully, but the hard look had gone from his face, and his lips wore a tender smile as he met Robin's earnest grey eyes. At that moment Mrs. Croll came up with the tea. She, decent woman, took a pride in waiting as punctiliously on the "top-floor" as if they had been princes of the blood, for her kind heart had warmed from the first to the lonely brothers, and she was a notable exception to the average London landlady, who is for the most part a mere sordid

machine, to whom the men and women under her roof are not human beings, but merely lodgers.

May melted into June, and June in her turn gave place to July. The weather had been oppressively hot. Fresh air was at a premium in Lark Street. Dick's cough was more troublesome than ever, and he was often so languid and exhausted that he could not write anything for days. He had always hoped to feel stronger "when the warm weather came;" and now it had come, and taken all his little remaining strength from him. He grew weaker every day, and at last, urged thereto by constant respectful advice from Mrs. Croll, went to see a doctor in the neighbourhood. The doctor told him plainly that he was in a very bad way, gave him a tonic, and recommended port wine, light nourishing food, and change of air. He also added that too often most impossible of all prescriptions, "complete rest from all brain work, worry, and anxiety." But he did not add, what he had seen at a glance, that Dick's remaining days on earth were but few, and that his left lung was almost entirely gone. Dick took the tonic, but, funds being low just then, left the other prescriptions for a future time. As for the last—well, the thought preyed upon his mind night and day, with a constant, wearing anxiety, "If I am going to be seriously ill, if I am not going to get better, what will become of Robin?"

It was a clear, bright Sunday, the air was much cooler than it had been for days, and a fresh, healthy breeze was blowing. Until lately Dick had always made a point of attending, with Robin, each Sunday some place of public worship. Sometimes they went to one church,

sometimes another, and as Dick's views as to sects and denominations were not narrow, Robin had heard many a good preacher, orthodox and otherwise. He understood what he heard, too, as well, or perhaps better, than most church-goers, thanks to Dick's gentle, patient explanations on the way home, or during their Sunday walks, or in the quiet Sunday evenings. Robin rarely went out alone. His brother had a horror of the child's associating with the coarse-tongued, lawless little ruffians of Lark Street, and Robin wanted no companion, if not Dick. They had not attended church for several Sundays, but to-day, as Dick felt rather better than usual, and as the day was so fine and not too warm, the brothers walked very slowly and, on Dick's part, very wearily, to a church about twenty minutes' walk from Lark Street. As the day advanced the air grew chillier, the sun disappeared, and the fresh breeze changed into a sharp, strong wind, which blew the little white clouds across the blue sky, and brought other and heavier clouds from the west that soon obscured the blue altogether. When the service was over and the congregation streamed out of the well-filled church, a heavy rain was falling, a hopeless, determined rain, which held out no prospect of clearing off. It swept the pavements furiously, and as Dick and Robin had no umbrella they were speedily drenched. During the latter part of the way Dick took his brother in his arms and carried him, much against the little fellow's will, as far as their own door. But this exertion exhausted Dick so much that he coughed without stopping for almost half an hour after they got home.

"I say," said Robin, employing his usual formula as

they sat in dry clothes after their simple dinner was over, "you haven't eaten hardly a scrap of dinner, Dick, and you're shivering most awfully. I shouldn't wonder if you've got more cold. Shall I set light to the fire? Perhaps you won't cough so much then."

Dick assented with a weary little gesture, and in a few minutes a cheery blaze lit up the walls of the dingy room, making a pleasing contrast to the soaking rain and grey sky outside. Dick lay down on the stiff little horsehair sofa, and Robin, having covered him up with an overcoat and a rug, curled himself up on the hearth as close to his brother as possible. Dick was utterly worn out, and soon fell into an uneasy slumber, while Robin sat blinking at the fire as still as a mouse, until Mrs. Croll, in her Sunday cap and apron, pushed open the door with the tea-tray. Rob raised his little hand with a gesture as touching as it was old-fashioned for his years. But Dick opened his eyes and sat up.

"How are you feeling to-night, Mr. Conyers?" Mrs. Croll asked respectfully, as she placed the tray on the table. But a sudden fit of coughing seized Dick, and when it was over he was too much exhausted to speak for a minute or two.

"You're not much better, sir, I'm afraid," went on the landlady, looking down at him compassionately.

"Much as usual, thank you, Mrs. Croll," he said faintly, sinking back again on the hard, uncomfortable cushion. "I can't get rid of this cough, you see."

Mrs. Croll shook her head mournfully and went out, closing the door very softly behind her.

"Let me pour out the tea to-night, Dick?" asked Robin eagerly, "and I'll bring yours over to you,"

"Mind you don't scald yourself, then," assented Dick, with the gentle smile he always had for Robin.

The child dragged a chair to the table, and kneeling upon it, he proceeded, with a grave and important face, to fill the two cups without spilling a drop. Then he drew another chair within reach of Dick's hand, and placed one cup and plate thereon, after having laboriously buttered two pieces of bread.

"I'm getting quite a man, Dick," he said seriously, as he climbed upon his chair again and attacked his own bread and butter.

"You are a good little fellow, anyway," responded Dick; "I don't know what I should do without you."

Rob's tiny heart swelled with pride at these words, but he went on munching his bread in silence. He was pondering in his childish mind the meaning of some chance words he had heard Mrs. Croll use the day before, as he came upstairs.

"And what the blessed child will do when his poor brother's taken, the Lord above only knows," had been the words he had overheard. And by some indefinable intuition he had known that they referred to Dick and himself. *Taken!* What did Mrs. Croll mean? The words sank into his mind.

"What is it to be *taken*, Dick?" he asked suddenly, some hours afterwards, when the wild wet twilight had been shut out by the darkness, and the fire glowed and flickered peacefully. Dick still reclined on the sofa, and Robin sat at the table beside the candle, with the "witch-book," as he always called it, open before him.

"To be taken?" repeated Dick absently. "I'm sure I don't know, little one. Why?"

Rob climbed down from his chair and took up his favourite position on the floor.

"Mrs. Croll said something yesterday about your being *taken*. At least I'm sure she was speaking of you. What did she mean?"

Dick's dark eyes grew darker, tenderer.

"Come here, little one," he said gently, holding out his hand as he spoke, "and I'll tell you what I think she meant."

Robin shuffled on his knees to his brother's side, and placed himself within his encircling arm.

"I have wanted to talk to you of this for some time, Rob," Dick went on in a very low voice. "But you are such a little chap yet, I hardly know how to begin so that you will understand."

"I'm seven years old," observed Rob, looking rather hurt; "at least, I shall be in a fortnight."

Dick was silent for a few minutes; then he said, and his voice shook a little:

"Robin, old fellow—I think Mrs. Croll meant—that I am going to leave you."

"To leave me, Dick?" repeated the child, looking up at him with startled, uncomprehending eyes.

"Yes. You know, Rob, I have been getting worse for a long time, and I saw the doctor again yesterday. He says that—I shall never be any better—that very soon —" He stopped, and then went on in a sharp anguished voice that was almost a cry, "Oh, my little brother, how can I tell you! How can I leave you all alone!"

For a moment Robin was speechless; then, his eyes dark with terror, he burst out:

"Dick! Dick! You don't mean—oh *say* you don't

mean that you are going away like father did—that you are going to *die*! Ah, Dick, *don't* say it!”

“My dear little Robin, that is what I do mean,” said Dick in unsteady tones, holding the child close to his breast, and caressing the fair, thick hair.

“Oh, Dick, don't! don't! I can't stay here without you,” cried Robin in a passion of agonized tears. “I don't want to go on living if you are going to die. Ask God to let me die too.”

“Hush, hush,” whispered Dick agitatedly. “Be brave, Rob, and listen to me. It is not time for you to die yet. I want you to grow up into a good, true man, and—”

“I can't be good if you are not here,” wailed the poor little fellow, with heavy bursting sobs that went to Dick's heart. “There will be nobody to care.”

“Yes, my Robin, there will be God to care,” said Dick in a low voice.

“But I want *you*!” sobbed the child. “I can't see God. I want you. Oh, Dick, nobody can be like you!” And in a passion of sobs and tears, he broke from his brother's loving hold, and rushing into the darkest corner of the room, he flung himself on the ground and cried as though his heart would break.

“Robin, come here, old fellow, come here to me,” said Dick in a tender, troubled voice. But the child took no notice, and after speaking to him once or twice, his brother judged it better to let him have his cry out, and waited until the passionate sobs grew fainter and gradually ceased altogether. Then Dick rose, and stooping over him, took the little hot hands from the tear-stained face. As he did so, a half-sad smile curved his lips, for he saw that Robin had cried himself to sleep.

In an old-fashioned, ramblingly-built house in one of the northern counties, a stately old man—stately still, though his years approached ninety—sat in his gloomy library in the eerie summer twilight. His haughty face, which would have been handsome but for the hard, cold eyes, wore a look of mingled grief, chagrin, and disappointment. For his grandson, his only acknowledged grandson, was dead—swept off the deck of his yacht in a storm—and the old man knew that the splendid estate of Corinmains would go, in spite of him, to the son of his own scapegrace youngest son, clever, devil-may-care Teddy Conyers and his low-born wife. It was a bitter thought. He sat silent there for a long time, while the room grew darker, and the wind moaned through the pines in the avenue outside. But as he mused his face grew softer, his eyes almost wistful. Over the mantelpiece hung the portrait of a youth, apparently about one-and-twenty. A face line for line like the face of young Dick Conyers—line for line except the mouth, which was weak and undecided, though sweet as a woman's.

The old man rose, and gazed long and earnestly at the proud, daring, intellectual face. And as he gazed, his heart, which had been frozen for twenty-three years, thawed, and became a human heart again.

"Ay, ay, poor Ted," he reflected, and his stern lips trembled. "Poor Ted! Perhaps, after all, I was wrong; I might as well have forgiven him. Where is the boy, I wonder—or were there two? Dick, the eldest was called, I fancy. *He* can't have made any low marriage yet, he's too young. Pshaw!" He frowned, rang for the lamp, and settled himself before the fire—for it was a chilly

night—with a magazine, of which he cut the leaves slowly and deliberately. He skimmed over the contents, and soon became absorbed in an exceedingly clever article on one of the leading topics of the day, an article which he had seen favourably noticed in several leading literary papers, which all spoke highly of the promise of the writer. As he turned to the last page the old man startled violently, and glanced involuntarily at the portrait over the mantelpiece. For the writer's signature was the same as his own—Richard Conyers. He rose, and walked agitatedly up and down the room.

"It must be Ted's boy," he muttered. "Poor Ted! Poor Ted! And so the lad has inherited his father's talent. Thank God he has not taken after his vapid, low-born mother. He will make a name in the world. He will be famous. He will be worthy to inherit the old place; and, by Heaven, this shall be his home henceforward. I'll go to town in the morning and get his address from his publishers. I'm sure there was another one—a baby. I'll bring them both. They'll be glad enough! Egad! he must be a clever young fellow!" Trembling with excitement, he sat down and read the article over again, carefully and critically. Then he rang, and desired that the housekeeper, Mrs. Briggs, should be sent to him at once.

"Mrs. Briggs," he said, as she entered, and his voice shook in spite of his efforts to maintain his usual calm and dignified manner, "I wish rooms to be prepared for my two grandsons, whom I expect will be here tomorrow. My eldest grandson, Mr. Richard Conyers, is a literary man," he continued pompously, "so have the corner room, overlooking the park, arranged as a study,

and have everything ready by six o'clock to-morrow evening."

The old housekeeper looked pleased, though tearful, for she knew it was "Master Ted's boys" who were coming to the home from which their father had been an exile and an alien, and to which they themselves were as yet strangers.

After the night when Robin had cried himself to sleep in his passionate grief, he followed his brother about like a persistent little shadow; though, indeed, Dick rarely left the sofa now. If he slept during the day, Robin sat patiently at his side until he awoke. And at other times the little fellow sat watching him with a wistful, heart-broken look in his childish eyes that pierced his brother's very soul. Dick was very weak now. Every day his cough seemed to rack and tear him more cruelly. Every day found him more worn and exhausted. He had given up writing altogether of late, and had barely strength to look over and correct his last proofs. His last, indeed! he thought, sadly. When he had given them to Robin to post, he fell back, almost fainting; the slightest exertion tried him so terribly now.

"Robin," he said one night, when they had remained silent for a long time in the gathering summer twilight, "Robin, come here, little one; I want to talk to you." Robin came to his side silently. Dick was lying on the couch, for he could no longer sit up for any length of time. "I have written to grandfather," he went on, after a minute or two, "and asked him to take care of you when—when I can take care of you no longer. I think he will not refuse."

Robin had crept closer to him, for Dick's voice was very faint and low. The child's breast heaved, his eyes filled with tears; but he pressed his little lips firmly together, and clasped his hands tightly behind him, that he might not cry.

"I daresay I have given you a wrong impression of him," continued Dick in troubled tones. "I'm afraid I have. He may be very different now, and I know you will try to please him, Rob. Won't you, old fellow?"

"Yes," answered the child, with trembling lips.

"And, Rob, remember," and Dick's weak voice grew almost stern, "never tell a lie; never break a promise; and," earnestly, "do nothing that you would be ashamed of your old Dick knowing, if he were with you. Promise me this, dear little one."

"Yes, dear Dick, I promise," faltered the little fellow. Then piteously, "Oh, Dick, I *must* cry, I can't help it," and throwing himself upon his brother's breast he sobbed passionately and hysterically. Dick spoke to him soothingly and tenderly, and Rob soon controlled himself with wonderful self-command for so young a child.

"Dick," he said, after a pause, "I ask God every night in my prayers to let me die when you do. Do you think He will?"

Dick did not answer; he could not; but he drew Robin closer to him and held him very tightly. Robin could not see his face; but he had an awed feeling that Dick was crying.

There was a long silence after that, and then, quite suddenly, Dick was seized with a terrible fit of coughing, a fit so violent, and lasting so long, that Robin ran in dismay for Mrs. Croll, who hurried upstairs with her cap

all awry, but her kind face full of sympathy and concern.

Dick was lying back, white and exhausted, with closed eyes and quick-drawn breath. The paroxysm had ceased, but the handkerchief he held was stained a deep ominous crimson.

Rob uttered a low cry.

"Oh, dear heart!" exclaimed Mrs. Croll hastily. "Run round, Master Robin dear, for the doctor, and tell him to be quick."

Robin fled like the wind, and returned in an incredibly short space of time.

"The doctor is out," he panted; "but they will send him whenever he comes in."

Dick smiled faintly, and pressed his brother's hand.

"Don't let me keep you, Mrs. Croll," he said, in a weak whisper. "Robin will do all I want; I am all right now."

Mrs. Croll went away—rubbing her eyes with her rough apron as she went—and left her kitchen half cleaned to watch at the door for the doctor.

"Dick," said Robin, with quivering lips and wet eyes, "you are not—going away—*now*? You look so white. *Say* you are not!"

"No, no," whispered Dick, with his old tender smile. "Don't look so terrified, my wee fellow. Put your head down here—I can't talk—much."

"Coughing so long has tired you," said Robin, putting his arm under Dick's head in his grave, quaint way; "perhaps you will fall asleep now."

"Perhaps," Dick answered. "I am very tired. Kiss me, old fellow."

Robin laid his lips softly on his brother's forehead, and then stood stroking his hair, as he remembered Dick used to do when he (Robin) was ill long ago.

The room gradually became quite dark. Dick seemed to sleep; his head lay heavily on the slender little arm that supported it.

As a neighbouring clock struck ten, Mrs. Croll came up again, this time with the doctor.

"Hush! Dick is asleep!" whispered Robin, as the doctor held the candle over the white still face.

Yes, Dick was asleep. But it was the sleep from which there is no awaking.

Robin's wild grief when he realised that his brother had gone from him, was piteous to see and hear. Mrs. Croll took him downstairs on that first terrible night, but with the earliest streak of dawn he crept up to Dick again, to the room which seemed already so strangely hushed and silent, and sat holding the chill hand in his, and kissing passionately the quiet, worn face which would soften and smile for him no more.

They had laid Dick on his bed in the little inner room; the windows of both rooms were open; the bullfinch was singing gaily. Robin thought its song seemed heartless and cruel. He laid his head down on the pillow beside Dick, and sobbed silently.

Mrs. Croll coming up at her own breakfast-time, found him there.

"Do come downstairs, Master Robin," the good creature entreated tearfully, "and have some tea and toast with me. You can do your poor brother no good now. He is better off, and doesn't need you, my lamb. Come away."

But the child only shook his head, and looked wistfully at the white, almost stern, face on the pillow. He did not understand it, poor little soul. He felt half afraid of this strange, cruel Dick, who would not speak to him, who lay so still and cold, not heeding the kisses and the tears of the little brother he had loved so fondly.

"I never said good-bye to him," he said, looking up into Mrs. Croll's face with miserable, anguished eyes. "Never promised him again that I would be good, and do all that he said." The little faithful, desolate heart overflowed, and he cried as he had never cried before. Mrs. Croll went away. She was crying, too.

After a long time Robin rose, and walked to the open window of the front room. Down in the witch-woman's shop he saw lovely bunches of flowers. They were not in their first freshness, but they looked lovely to Rob. He remembered seeing a funeral the very last time he and Dick were out together, and the coffin was covered with flowers. They would put his darling brother in a coffin, too, he thought with a shudder. He looked down again at the flowers. He felt sure the witch-woman would give him some if he told her Dick was dead. He did not feel afraid of her now. He slipped downstairs very quietly, for he dreaded lest Mrs. Croll should see him and take him into her kitchen. Tea or toast would choke him, he thought wretchedly. When he got out into the air he staggered a little, for he was sick and giddy with crying, and he had eaten nothing all day. The tears dimmed his eyes so that he could hardly see as he ran across the street. Ere he reached the other side a heavy dray came thundering past, and Robin, startled and confused, stumbled and fell under the

horses' feet. There was a sharp, shrill cry, a hoarse shout; then the sound of many voices, the hurrying of many feet. Robin lay motionless on the hard stones, nor did he stir when they lifted him. A tall young man pushed his way through the crowd which had rapidly collected. It was the doctor who had come the night before to see Dick. He carried the child into the nearest doorway—which chanced to be the witch-woman's shop—felt his heart and his little thin wrist, then shook his head, for both heart and pulse were still. The cruel wheels had passed over the slender little neck, and Robin was dead.

Towards the evening of the same day a hansom stopped at Mrs. Croll's door, and a white-haired, haughty-looking old gentleman alighted slowly and painfully.

"Pooh! This can't be the place," he muttered, leaning on his gold-headed stick to look up at the windows. "The boy can't live *here*—it's impossible."

Mrs. Croll opened the door in answer to his imperative knock.

"You are—a friend of Mr. Conyers, sir?" she asked in subdued tones. For indeed there was a startling likeness between this face and a young dead face upstairs.

"Yes. Can I see him?" said the stranger, in tones that shook in spite of himself.

And Mrs. Croll, supposing from his evident agitation that he knew of the sad events of the last two days, led the way in respectful silence to the third floor. The visitor entered the outer room slowly, and Mrs. Croll went away quietly, closing the door behind her.

It was very still in the room. The window stood

open, and the wind ruffled the scented leaves of the musk-plant on the sill. The bullfinch was silent in its cage.

The old man walked to the door of the inner room and went in. Then he stood still, and a terrible change passed over his face; for he saw that he was too late. Another guest—a guest who takes no denial—had been there before him; and Corinmains would pass to strangers.



TWO DAGGERS AND A CORONET.





Two Daggers and a Coronet.



THE tidal train was on the point of starting from Charing Cross. People were hurrying to and fro, jostling each other rudely, for the station was crowded. Porters were driving trucks piled with luggage recklessly along the platform, regardless of life or limb.

In an otherwise empty compartment of a first-class carriage, Captain Charles Fitzgerald had settled himself and his belongings with a view to luxurious comfort, and was congratulating himself that he would remain undisturbed as far as Dover; for the door was locked, and the train, as I have said, just about to start. He was in the act of unfolding the yet damp sheets of the *Spectator*, when a key was hastily applied to the door, and a young man sprang in, supplemented by a neatly-strapped rug and a travelling bag. The whistle sounded, the door was banged, and they were off.

"A near thing!" observed the new-comer, rather out of breath. "And all owing to an ass of a cabman. Would insist on charging me three shillings from the Euston Road."

"Better pay three shillings than lose your train," observed Fitzgerald with a smile.

"Oh, yes, that's all very well; but three shillings is a consideration to me," returned the other frankly, as he unstrapped his rug. For the night was cold, though it was the end of July.

Fitzgerald tilted his cap further over his eyes, thinking the while what a singularly pleasant face his companion had. If there was one thing upon which Charles Fitzgerald prided himself, and with some reason, it was his astuteness in reading character; and this young fellow's appearance pleased him mightily.

Fitzgerald himself was a big, good-natured fellow of thirty, or thereabouts, with a deep voice, sleepy grey eyes, a sweeping, fair moustache, and an air of being on easy terms with the world in general. The other was tall too, but slight. He looked quite young, barely twenty-five, and had a delicate-featured, girlish face, with laughing light hazel eyes and sunny hair. He was clean-shaved, with the exception of very slight, short whiskers, and was dressed in a suit of dark tweed, which, though well-made, appeared slightly the worse for wear. Having replaced his hat by a rather shabby little travelling-cap, he settled himself in his corner, and became absorbed in the *Sportsman*. Some miles had been traversed in silence, when Fitzgerald, producing his cigar-case, selected a cigar, and offered one to his companion.

"Thank you, I don't smoke," said the other, looking up from his paper with a smile.

Fitzgerald looked surprised.

"No? I thought you looked like a smoker," he said as he struck a match.

"I don't care about it," returned his companion. "Besides," thoughtfully, "I find it clouds the brain."

"Ah, perhaps. Then I presume you don't drink either?"

"No," with another smile.

"Well, I don't know but that you are right," observed Fitzgerald lazily. "I've often thought of going in for that sort of thing myself. And yet—I might do without liquor, daresay I could—but, by Jove! I don't think I could forswear tobacco."

"You're crossing to-night, I suppose?" said the other, after a pause.

"Yes. I have a few weeks' leave, which I intend spending in Spain. It's the only European country I don't know. I mean to go straight through to Madrid, then north as far as Oviedo; I want to see the Spanish gun factories near Trubia. Then I shall go as far south as my time allows."

"Ah, that's curious. I'm going to Madrid, so we are likely to be travelling companions for some time. Do you speak Spanish?"

"Very imperfectly, I am sorry to say."

"Well, I can help you there. It's awkward getting along if you are not well up in the language. I know Spain very well. It's a queer country, and a fellow wants all his wits about him."

They got on to talk on various subjects after this, and as the train neared Dover, Fitzgerald, who was conscious of a rapidly-growing liking to this handsome, gentlemanly young fellow, said genially:

"By the way, as we are to be *compagnons de voyage*, we may as well be better acquainted." And pulling out

his card-case he extracted a card therefrom, and handed it to his companion, who glanced at it with a courteous smile.

"I'm sorry I haven't a card of mine to give you in return," he said, with a boyish look of regret in his handsome eyes; "but my name is Royston—Julian Royston."

Here the train ran along the platform at Dover, and the two men mingled with the stream of other passengers, and hastened on board the waiting boat. It had begun to rain, and the air felt raw and chilly.

"It looks like a dirty night," observed Royston, turning up his coat-collar and regarding the sky attentively, as the steamer dipped and rocked about in the manner peculiar to Channel steamers.

"Sorry to hear it," said Fitzgerald with a shrug of his broad shoulders. "It's a bad look out for me."

Just then the boat, which had left the pier some minutes before, began to pitch frightfully, and most of the passengers on deck became conspicuous by their absence.

Now, truth compels me to state, that fine manly fellow as he undoubtedly was, Captain Fitzgerald was not a particularly good sailor. Indeed, to be quite candid, he was distinctly the reverse. Though he had performed no inconsiderable number of voyages, the result had been invariably the same. The most moderate storm was sufficient to drive him precipitately to his berth, where he would remain prostrate for hours, or perhaps days, a disgusted and hopeless martyr to the anguished paroxysms and degrading agonies of violent sea-sickness. Therefore, as there was a very respectable gale blowing on the night I speak of, the boat was barely outside

Dover harbour when Fitzgerald changed colour visibly, and tossed away his cigar.

"I think I'll go down and have some brandy," he said with a decidedly sickly smile, when the steamer had executed some truly fiendish twists and rolls.

"Do," said Royston. "You're a bad sailor, I can see."

Accordingly Fitzgerald went below, and throwing himself on an empty corner couch in the dimly-lighted cabin, he closed his eyes, and longed for death—or Calais.

During one of those respites which, happily, even this cruel and humiliating malady grants its victims, he looked up to see Royston standing looking down at him with some concern.

"I say, you are very bad!" he said gravely, as he surveyed his miserable and exhausted companion.

Fitzgerald evidently thought this remark required no reply, for he made none.

"Now, will you let me prescribe for you?" went on Royston. "Bet I cure you in a jiffey."

A deep groan was the only answer.

Royston disappeared, steering his way among the prostrate forms around him as steadily and deftly as though it had been a dead calm. In a few minutes he was back again, bearing a tumbler about half full of whipped egg. In his other hand he held a small folded paper packet.

"Now, you see," he said, with what appeared to Fitzgerald heartless geniality, "I drop this powder—so—into these whipped yolks of eggs. You drink it up, and there you are!"

Eggs! Fitzgerald's very soul revolted at the thought.

"Oh, leave me alone," he groaned wretchedly. "And for Heaven's sake don't talk to me of anything so disgustingly loathsome as *eggs*!" But upon Royston's good-natured entreaties, and representations that he (Fitzgerald) could not be worse than he was, he finally consented, not without a few muttered objurgations, to swallow the untempting mixture. I don't know what the powder was—would that I did—but its effects were marvellous; for within the next five minutes Captain Fitzgerald was able to sit up, free from the slightest feeling of squeamishness, and declared himself equal to going on deck.

"Come along then," said Royston, good-humouredly linking his arm in his companion's. "Hallo! that was a roller!" For a sudden heave of the vessel sent both men reeling across the cabin, full against the prostrate form of a dishevelled-looking elderly lady, who occupied the opposite seat.

"I beg your pardon," stammered Fitzgerald, steadying himself as well as he could. At the same moment Royston uttered a sharp exclamation of pain, for an ill-natured-looking poodle, which had been keeping jealous guard over its mistress, had resented this intrusion—not to mention an unintentional dig in the ribs from Royston—by a wicked snap at that gentleman's right arm, midway between the wrist and the elbow.

"Confound you, you little brute," he muttered, pitching it angrily off the seat, regardless of its mistress's expostulatory moans. "Let's get out of this," he went on, seizing his companion's arm again.

"Bitten you?" inquired Fitzgerald, as they struggled on deck.

"Nothing to speak of," said the other carelessly, pushing up his cuff. "The beast has left his teeth-marks, but the skin is unbroken."

"I'm surprised that a sensible fellow like you should disfigure your flesh in that way," said Fitzgerald, who had bent forward to examine the other's arm.

Royston laughed and coloured. Fitzgerald fancied he looked rather annoyed.

"Oh, that," he said, pulling down his cuff hastily. "That was a boyish freak. As you say, it is a piece of folly."

The "folly" alluded to was the deeply tattooed delineation just above Royston's right wrist, of two crossed daggers, surmounted by a coronet. It was most artistically done, and showed distinctly against his singularly white skin. Under the daggers was the single letter M.

By this time, with infinite trouble and patience, Fitzgerald had lit a cigar.

"By Jove!" he said heartily, "I shall never forget your kindness, Royston. I am awfully indebted to you; I feel as fit as possible. Why didn't you doctor some of the other unfortunates? That old lady, for instance?"

"Hadn't another powder left," replied the other. "It's a specific I had from an old Spanish captain I met in Mexico. He gave me several rather valuable hints about drugs and that." A curious smile flitted across his face as he spoke, but it was gone again instantly.

"Travelled much?" inquired Fitzgerald lazily, as he leant against the bulwarks to steady himself.

"A goodish bit," answered the other.

This led to an exchange of mutual travelling experiences, in the course of which Fitzgerald, who was an

impulsive, warm-hearted fellow, felt more drawn than ever towards this genial and really lovable young stranger. Besides, he was intensely grateful to him for his timely and efficacious assistance, and by the time they had left Calais behind them, and were steaming along the railway towards the French capital, almost looked upon him as an old friend.

They reached Paris in the soft light of the summer morning, and went on to Bordeaux, where they remained all night. From there they proceeded to Madrid, and put up at an unobtrusive-looking *fonda* in a narrow street somewhat back from the Puerta del Sol. They "did" Madrid in the usual way, and enjoyed themselves hugely.

One evening, as they were leisurely sipping their coffee after dinner, it chanced that the conversation turned upon gaming.

"I'm rather lucky at play, as a rule; always was," remarked Fitzgerald, as he lit a cigar (he despised cigarettes) and leaned lazily back in his chair.

"I am not," said the other shortly. Then, after a pause, he continued, "The passion for gaming has been my curse. I am invariably unlucky, devilishly unlucky; but I always have an insatiable desire to try my luck again. It is an insanity with me. I am hard enough up now, and if I don't get that appointment here I told you of I shall be harder up still; but I once had a fortune—I won't tell you how much, you wouldn't believe me if I did. I lost it all at a game called Monte. Any coin I happen to have goes the same way; some demon within me always prompts me with a mad hope *that* I may win back my lost fortune. If I had a thou-

sand pounds now I would go straight to the nearest casino and play like the devil ; the luck would be against me to a dead certainty ; I should come out without a *peseta*."

"I don't play much," said Fitzgerald, thoughtfully flicking the ash off his cigar. "Luck has a way of turning at times, don't you know, and I have had one or two rather tight squeezes, lucky though I am in general."

"Do you know the game of Monte?" asked Royston suddenly.

"I have played—not often, though. It's a great game here, is it not?"

"Yes. If you care to come I can take you—now—to a casino where they play higher than anywhere in Madrid."

"All right," returned Fitzgerald, getting up and stretching himself. "We may as well go there as anywhere else ; we needn't play, you know—to any extent."

"Ever been to Monte Carlo?" said Royston, as they crossed the Puerta del Sol.

"Yes, often. Have you?"

"Rather! I had my first taste of gaming there, years ago. For the first and last time I broke the bank. I went back the next day, and came out with—a five-franc piece. Never had any luck since."

"Curious—how luck goes," said Fitzgerald, stopping to light a fresh cigar. "I have only had a turn at the Monte Carlo tables half-a-dozen times or so, but each time I won some hundreds. I don't go in for that sort of thing much—now. It's risky, deuced risky. And besides," with a rather embarrassed laugh, "I'm engaged to be married, and—well, in short, I've given up gaming—at least, very nearly."

"Ah!" said the other, with a sudden, almost painful contraction of his delicately-cut features, "I was once engaged to be married, years ago. Oh, I'm older than I look. And I, too—but there," abruptly, "it's folly to rake up old memories. This way, Fitzgerald."

He led the way down a dark side-street, and after several short cuts and sharp turnings they passed through a narrow doorway and found themselves in the card-room of a certain casino in the Calle de Atocha. It was a long, low room, brilliantly lighted by lamps hung from the ceiling. On either side of the narrow green table which ran almost the entire length of the apartment, about a dozen men were seated, their swarthy faces dimly visible through clouds of tobacco smoke.

"I've heard," said Royston in an undertone to Fitzgerald as they entered, "that the bank here is backed by a pretty high authority in Madrid; so it's good for any amount."

"Oh, I shan't risk more than a tenner, if that," answered the other in the same tone.

There was a curious stillness in the room, broken only by the clink of money, and the hoarse "*Juego!*" of the dealer, behind whose chair the two new-comers stood for some time. After watching the game for a few rounds Royston ventured a few *pesetas*, and lost. He tried again—a larger sum this time—and again lost. He tried again, and yet again, increasing his stakes each time, but with the same result. A muttered curse broke from between his teeth; then, with a slight shrug of his shoulders, he said carelessly:

"Have a try, Fitzgerald."

With a lazy smile, Fitzgerald backed the king, which

lay nearest him, with ten gold pieces. He won. Next round he placed twenty gold pieces on the seven in the lower row. Again he won. The cards were dealt once more, and Fitzgerald, with a comical look at Royston, placed forty gold coins on the seven next him. A seven was the second card dealt.

"Good! Go seven *gólpes* with what you've won," whispered Royston excitedly. "The luck's all with you."

The other laughed and placed his winnings on the queen, which lay in the top row. Again fortune smiled on the tall, indolent-looking Englishman.

"*Caramba!*" muttered a lank-faced old Spaniard between the puffs of his cigarette. "*Los Ingleses son muy afortunados!*"

After "going" a few more *gólpes*—which, for the benefit of my uninitiated readers, I may say is simply the term given in the game of Monte in Spain to doubling the stakes a given number of times—Fitzgerald had won what in English money equalled about £2,500.

"Now for a final stroke!" he said. "I'll risk all I have won on the card nearest me, whatever it may be. And whether I win or lose, I shall play no more."

The cards were dealt. In the top row were a seven and an ace. In the lower row a queen and a knave.

The players looked eagerly to see which card the fortunate Englishman would patronize. He at once, and with an appearance of utter indifference, backed the seven. One or two followed his example. Others, thinking, probably, that fortune might prove contrary, backed variously the three remaining cards.

The dealer slowly "pulled" the cards. Breathless

silence reigned. The dark faces round the table were full of an eager, intense excitement, their glittering eyes bent upon the slowly-falling pieces of pasteboard.

Half the pack was dealt, and as yet neither ace, queen, knave, nor seven had appeared.

"The devil! You'll lose!" exclaimed Royston quickly.

Fitzgerald was now looking rather excited too, for him; but he only said in quiet, even tones:

"I think not."

The next card dealt was—a seven!

He had won £5,000.

The dealer, with a courteous smile, handed him two-thirds of the amount in Spanish notes, and explained that if the *señor* would wait, he would procure the remainder. The *señor* acquiesced, with a grave bow.

Meanwhile the Spaniards were gesticulating excitedly, and chattering like a colony of rooks. The winners were jubilant, the losers morose and gloomy. One young fellow, who had staked his last *alfonso* on the queen, rose and staggered out, his face like death, his eyes heavy with despair. *Los Ingleses* stood calm and silent; Fitzgerald slightly flushed, Royston very pale.

In a short time the dealer returned.

"Will not the *señor* try again?" he said as he put the roll of notes into Fitzgerald's hand. "Such good fortune is certain to follow the *señor* throughout the evening."

But Captain Fitzgerald shook his head, and murmuring a few words in lamentably bad Spanish, placed his winnings in the breast-pocket of his overcoat, and in company with Royston sauntered from the room.

He was in high spirits as they traversed the gaily-

lighted streets. Royston, on the other hand, was rather silent and *distract*.

"By Jove!" he broke out suddenly. "Five thousand pounds!" Then with a short laugh, "You're a lucky fellow!"

"I had a curious conviction, do you know," returned the other thoughtfully, "that I should have lost the next round. That was why I stopped."

"Ah, there's where we differ," said Royston in somewhat curt tones. "I couldn't have stopped—then."

"I say, let's go to some theatre," suggested Fitzgerald, glancing at his watch. "It's early yet. Then we'll go back to our hotel, have a cigar and a drink, and turn in. And to-morrow we'll start by an early train, and do the Escorial."

An hour or two afterwards, they were seated in the coffee-room of the Fonda de —, Fitzgerald, as usual, with a cigar between his lips, and—also as usual—with a tumbler of brandy and water at his elbow. (The wine he declared to be filthy and undrinkable.) He did most of the talking; Royston—who was leaning back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head—merely replying in absent monosyllables. During a slight pause in the conversation, two suspicious-looking men—who had been seated at a small table slightly behind Fitzgerald—rose simultaneously, and left the room.

"I say," said Royston quietly, "wouldn't it be as well to keep quiet about your luck, Fitzgerald? I don't like the look of those two fellows," jerking his head backwards towards the door. "It's hardly wise to advertise so openly that you have such a large sum of money about you."

"I've more than money about me," returned Fitzgerald with a slight smile. "I have a very trusty friend who doesn't often fail me. No, my dear fellow, I don't mean you—I mean a very straight-shooting revolver."

"Oh, yes, that's all very well," said Royston seriously, "but fellows like these would have a knife into you before you could even take aim with your revolver. I knew of a man who was murdered in a hotel in this city only last year. He had some valuable jewels with him, and he was fool enough to show them in one of the *cafés*. In the morning he was found dead in his bed—stabbed to the heart—and the jewels were gone."

"Pooh, nonsense, Royston. In a public hotel! The thing is absurd."

"It is true, nevertheless," quietly.

"Well, you may set your mind at rest about me," observed Captain Fitzgerald drily. "If any man tries to get into my room to-night with intent to 'rob and plunder,' I'm very sorry for him. I am a very light sleeper, and a very fair shot; and I consider myself quite a match for any Spaniard—or two Spaniards—I have had the pleasure of meeting so far."

"Fitzgerald," said the other, leaning forward, and speaking in an odd, uncertain voice, "for Heaven's sake, promise me you will fasten your bedroom door."

"I'll be hanged if I do," returned Fitzgerald, who could be as obstinate as a mule at times. "Why, Royston, you look as white as a sheet. Hang it all, my good boy, do you think I can't take care of myself?"

He rose as he spoke, and with a friendly clap on the other's shoulder, crossed the room to lift a box of matches which lay on a distant table. He stopped as he

came back, and stood for a few seconds at one of the open windows, whistling softly to himself, and looking out into the moonlit street.

As he sat down again his arm caught his tumbler—which stood somewhat too near the edge of the table—and overturned it, spilling fully half the contents over Royston's knees.

"Confound you!" exclaimed the latter violently. "Mind what you are doing!"

Fitzgerald raised his eyebrows in not unnatural surprise.

"What on earth do you mean, Royston?" he said in rather haughty tones.

"I beg your pardon," returned the young fellow, hastily and apologetically. "I'm nervous, somehow, to-night, and your sudden movement startled me."

"Oh, it's all right," replied the other carelessly. Then he finished his brandy and water, with a view, as he said, to preventing further accidents, and lit another cigar.

After a quarter of an hour or so of rather desultory conversation, Fitzgerald said in a languid kind of way, "I feel most confoundedly drowsy and done up. I think I shall turn in."

"All right, so shall I," returned Royston, rousing himself with a start from a reverie into which he had apparently fallen. "Come on. You do look seedy."

They went upstairs, and Royston followed Fitzgerald into his room, which was next his own.

"Now, Fitzgerald," he said, as that gentleman proceeded to wind up his watch very slowly and laboriously, "I hope you will take the precaution of putting that money in a safe place——"

"I'll put it in my pocket-book, and my pocket-book under my pillow," interrupted the other drowsily. "I'll lay odds no one touches it there, for the least thing awakes me, and," with a sleepy laugh, "when I awake, my revolver will awake too."

"Ah, yes, that's right," answered Royston. "Hallo! what's the matter?" For Fitzgerald had reeled slightly, and dropped heavily into the nearest chair.

"I don't know," he said, passing his hand dazedly over his forehead, and speaking faintly and with evident effort. "I feel uncommonly queer. If I didn't know I *hadn't*, I should say I had taken more brandy than was good for me."

"Pooh, nonsense," giving him a little shake. "Rouse yourself, there's a good fellow, and get into bed."

"All right, you get out," said the other, rising somewhat unsteadily to his feet. "Call me in the morning."

"You are sure your revolver is loaded?" said Royston.

"Oh, hang it, yes," rather impatiently.

* * * *

It was just two o'clock. The moon was shining through the imperfectly shaded windows of the room where Fitzgerald lay in a heavy sleep, one arm thrown above his head, his breathing deep and regular. But in a few minutes he stirred uneasily, moaned as if in pain, and finally struggled to a drowsy sense of wakefulness. He lay for some time with closed eyes and clouded brain, dimly conscious of an indescribable feeling of nausea and giddiness. He tried to raise himself, to lift his hand, to turn his head, but a curiously weak, inert feeling pervaded all his limbs—nay, every muscle, and

seemed to render him incapable of the slightest movement. A cold perspiration broke over him ; he felt horribly sick and ill.

“What the deuce is the matter with me?” he thought wretchedly.

As he lay thus hovering on the borderlands of insensibility, he became vaguely aware of a slight sound in the room, and knew in some occult way that the door had opened and shut again. With a mighty effort he opened his eyes a little way, and saw that a man was stealthily crossing the room on tiptoe. A mask concealed the upper part of his face ; a scarf of some kind was wrapped across his mouth and chin. In his hand he carried a long, unsheathed knife, which gleamed and glittered in the moonlight. Fitzgerald’s first impulse was, of course, to put out his hand for his revolver, which lay at the bedside ; but though his will struggled fiercely against the strange weakness which held him powerless, it was in vain—he could not move. He tried to call out, but his lips were stiff and motionless.

The man, meanwhile, advanced towards the bed, and stooped down. Fitzgerald’s eyes were only half-open, as those of one who sleeps uneasily ; his breathing was laboured and irregular. But the intruder seemed satisfied, and cautiously and slowly felt under the pillow, from whence he drew the well-filled pocket-book, and placed it in the inner pocket of his coat. Then another thought seemed to strike him, and lifting the revolver, he deliberately unloaded it, laid it down again, and turned to leave the room. But ere he reached the door, Fitzgerald, with an almost superhuman effort, mastered the horrible, mysterious lethargy that chained him, and

flinging himself out of bed, staggered to his feet with a hoarse cry. The other muttered a frightful curse and raised his right arm. Fitzgerald saw the knife flash, cold and cruel, in the fitful light of the moon. He also saw, with a thrill of incredulous horror, that on the fellow's arm above his bare wrist there showed, distinct and unmistakable against the white skin—*two daggers and a coronet!*

He could even make out the letter M beneath the daggers.

The next moment the knife descended, aimed with deadly precision at his heart. But, still dazed and giddy, he fell heavily backwards; the moon became suddenly obscured, and the weapon, glancing aside in the darkness, buried itself in the fleshy part of his left arm. He felt warm breath on his cheek for a moment, and heard a few fiercely muttered words as the assassin bent over him. With a low groan Fitzgerald turned heavily over on his side; his confused brain took in the fact that the door opened and shut cautiously, that muffled feet passed down the uncarpeted corridor—then he lost consciousness.

He soon came to himself again, and struggling to sit up, he remained for some time confused, bewildered, fighting against the horrible suspicion which filled his mind. He rose to his feet with difficulty, for the flesh wound in his arm had bled profusely, and his head still felt light and queer. However, he lit the candle, and took a draught of brandy from his flask, which revived him considerably. Having bound up his arm as well as he could, he got into his clothes—awkwardly enough, for his arm was stiff and painful, and he was faint and

sick from loss of blood. Then with hasty uncertain steps he sought Royston's room.

It was empty.

He had a confused recollection, after that, of hurrying along the streets in the early dawn, his head throbbing, his brain reeling, his limbs as though weighted with lead. The weather had changed, there was a fine rain falling, and in a short time he was wet to the skin. But he went on and on unheeding, threading the narrow streets with unerring though unsteady feet, some instinct guiding his steps, until he reached the casino where fortune had so smiled upon him but a few hours before. Weary and exhausted, he blindly felt his way to the card-room, where the fair dawn was shut out, and the lamps flared and swirled over the eager anxious faces, haggard enough some of them, and pinched with the greed of gain. Fitzgerald pushed back the heavy curtain, and leant breathless and sick against the doorway. His languid heavy eyes wandered round the room until they rested on the face he sought—the face of Julian Royston! He sat at the far end of the table, his cheeks and lips bloodless, his teeth clenched, his gleaming eyes fixed on the ever-changing cards.

He was losing steadily and surely.

At last one solitary note remained. With trembling hands he staked it on the queen. A moment's suspense, and then—the opposite card won!

He covered his face with his hands for a second, and staggered to his feet. The next moment he raised his eyes and saw Fitzgerald, whose face, deadly pale, was but dimly visible in the shadow of the doorway. An expression of wild, incredulous horror flashed into

Royston's eyes. He threw up his arms with a terrible half-articulate cry,

"Oh, my God!"

The words, shrill with mingled terror, remorse and despair, rang through the crowded room, causing the men round the table to start to their feet in alarm.

And then—and then there was a quick movement of Royston's hand to his breast—the gleam and flash of steel—a deep groan—and he fell heavily forward across the table, his life-blood staining the cards which had been his ruin and his curse.

He had stabbed himself to the heart.



DIANA.



DIANA.



FEW people were better liked in Dimsford than Miss Hardwicke of the Manor. She was kind-hearted to a fault, hospitable, and generous. She was handsome, too, and came of a good old family. Besides all these claims to popularity, she had five thousand a year in her own right, which, you may be sure, did not make her any the less popular. It was entirely her own fault that at the age of sixty-seven she was still Miss Hardwicke, for her admirers had been legion. The admirers of single ladies with five thousand a year, are indeed, not far to seek, as a rule ; but Clemency Hardwicke in her young days, with her bonnie face, and her warm, impulsive heart, was a bargain no man need have regretted, even had these possessions been her only dower.

People said they wondered at her living alone in the grim-looking Manor—for it was a grim old mansion, though the grounds were like fairyland—and a few sage gossips had been heard to predict, with many head-shakings, and somewhat vague phraseology, that some day the poor dear old lady would find herself murdered in

her bed. For the Hardwicke diamonds and family plate were famous all over the county, and Miss Hardwicke—being a woman, and therefore self-willed—would not take the advice of her friends and well-wishers, and consign those valuables to the safe keeping of the bank. Indeed, to all appearance, the old lady's jewels and plate were the source of much keener anxiety to other people than to their possessor.

"What was the use of the solid old safe let into the wall in the east corridor," she would ask placidly, "if one could not have all one's belongings under one's own roof?" At any rate there they remained, secure and unmolested.

On the April night on which my story opens, Miss Hardwicke was in quite an excited frame of mind, for she expected a visitor. Not that visitors were anything unusual at Dimsford Manor; but this visitor was the daughter of Clemency Hardwicke's last surviving male relative, namely, her nephew, James Dare, who had sailed for America twenty years ago, married there, and, quite recently, died there. His aunt had heard nothing of him since he left England, until the letter arrived—written a few days before his death—begging her to be a friend to his only child Diana. Miss Hardwicke's heart warmed to this girl whom she had never seen, and she counted the days until her arrival with almost childish impatience and longing. Diana was not, however—the letter said—to proceed to Dimsford immediately on her arrival in England, but to spend a short time in Southport with a sister of her mother's. So Miss Hardwicke had been both surprised and delighted on the morning of this April day to receive a telegram from her grand-

niece, saying that she had just arrived in Liverpool, and would come straight on to Dimsford, arriving about seven o'clock. The old lady, therefore, had been very busy all day, superintending, with loving care, the arrangement of the pretty rooms which were to be occupied by the homeless stranger.

"So nice of the dear child," she mused, as she slowly paced up and down in the firelight, "to come straight here instead of going to Southport! I wonder if James has talked of me to her. Poor James! He was always a fine, warm-hearted fellow. I feel I shall love the dear girl."

As she glanced at the time-piece for the twentieth time in as many minutes, carriage wheels were heard grinding up the drive, and a few moments afterwards the hall-bell clanged loudly. Miss Hardwicke hastened into the hall, trembling with excitement. A tall, erectly-built girl was just entering, muffled in heavy wrappings.

"Auntie!" she exclaimed nervously. "Dear, dear Aunt Clemency." As she spoke she threw herself into the old lady's arms, and sobbed convulsively.

Aunt Clemency's kind heart was utterly taken by storm, and then and there she took the lonely girl into her affections for ever. And indeed Diana was very winning and lovable. She was a handsome girl, too, with well-cut, if rather large features, thick brown hair cut short in the then prevailing fashion, and a pair of splendid, heavily-lashed dark eyes. But handsome as she was, her principal charm was her manner. Frank, loving, and impulsive, there was a quaint air of almost boyish audacity about her which was irresistibly captivating. She looked quite twenty; but in reality, as her

aunt knew, she was only seventeen. Her conversation was bright and original, and by the time dinner was over Miss Hardwicke felt as though they had known each other for years.

"Am I like my father, do you think, auntie?" Diana asked, as they sat in the drawing-room after dinner.

"Well, dear," replied the old lady, "I can hardly tell. It is so long since I saw your poor father. But there is a look in your eyes that reminds me of what he was as a boy."

"I had a splendid portrait of my father," went on Diana, lifting her clear dark eyes to her aunt's, "and letters, and papers, and that. But do you know I lost the bag they were in, on board the steamer, or between the docks and the railway station at Liverpool. I *was* provoked, because," with a winsome little smile, "I didn't know if you would take a strange niece on her own credentials."

"My dear!" said her aunt, deprecatingly.

"I came over with such a queer girl," went on Diana, looking dreamily into the fire. "I quite liked her at first. She had soft dark eyes, something like yours, and a pretty, confiding kind of manner. She wasn't bad-looking, if she hadn't had a deep scar right across her left eyebrow. She said she had fallen and cut it when a child. Well, at first we were great friends, and quite confidential. I told her I was coming here to you, and all that, and then she told me about herself. She said she was quite alone in the world, and was going to be—let me see—I think she said an actress."

Miss Hardwicke looked very grave.

"My dear child," she remonstrated, "what a most

objectionable acquaintance for you! I hope and trust that you——”

“Wait a minute, auntie,” interrupted the girl, laughing. “By-and-bye we had a kind of row” (certainly Diana’s expressions were a little strong) “because—well, I went into my cabin, which was a little one I had all to myself, and found her with my bag open—the one I lost afterwards—turning over all my papers. I got mad, and said some rather rude things; and she cried, and told some fearful lies, which of course didn’t deceive *me*. So we were rather cool after that. But it struck me as odd that *that* bag should disappear, because it had all my spare money in it. You see, I *never* used to lock up things; but I will, after this.”

“Quite right,” said Miss Hardwicke impressively. “We must never put temptation in a fellow-creature’s way. And, my dear, you should not enter into conversation with strangers. A young girl cannot be too careful in travelling alone. I have no doubt she was some low, dishonest creature, whose object from the first was to steal the money,” concluded the old lady, with unwonted uncharitableness.

“Do you think she took it, then?” asked the girl wonderingly.

“My dear, I think there is but little doubt of it.”

“I guess you wouldn’t have thought that if you could have seen her,” said Diana, shaking her head thoughtfully. “She was such a sweet innocent-looking little thing! And yet it seemed queer, too.”

“But, Diana,” said Aunt Clemency in anxious tones, “I hope you had enough money to bring you comfortably here?”

"Well, I hadn't much," returned the girl, frankly. "But I got along. I say, auntie," she went on after a minute or two, "you weren't vexed at my coming straight here instead of going, as I ought to have done, to see my mother's people, were you? You see," with a wistful upward look, "father had talked so much of you, and I felt lonely, and so—and so—I came! Somehow," in a very low voice, "I felt it would be more like coming home."

The old lady coloured with pleasure.

"Vexed, my dear?" she replied. "Most certainly not. I am only too glad to learn you were prepared to love your old auntie. I hope you won't find it very dull here. Though, to be sure, there are plenty of nice young people within walking and driving distance," she added reflectively.

"Oh, I don't care much about young people," observed Diana. "Poor father and I were always together, you know; and we hadn't many friends."

A long conversation followed, regarding the girl's home life in America, and her passionate love for her dead father. All so simply and touchingly told, that the old lady's eyes overflowed more than once. Then there was a long silence, broken abruptly by Diana.

"Whose portrait is that?" she asked, pointing to a photograph-frame which stood on the mantelpiece.

"That is my godson, Chester Lennox," returned Miss Hardwicke, with some pride. "He is a barrister, very clever, and the dearest fellow in the world."

Diana took down the frame, and gazed at the portrait attentively. It represented a young man with a quiet, clever-looking face, a dark moustache, and keen, rather — *deep-set* eyes.

"Does he ever come here?" the girl asked, as she carefully replaced the frame again.

"Yes, often. I expect he may be down next week."

"Did he know I was coming?"

"Why, yes, my dear, of course. He quite looks forward to knowing you."

"Perhaps he won't like me," observed Diana gravely.

"He is sure to like you," returned the old lady, leaning back in her chair with a little smile.

"You remind me of some old picture, Aunt Clemency," said the girl softly, after a pause, turning her great eyes almost reverently on her companion, "with your black velvet gown and soft lacey cap, and your lovely dark eyes and white hair. Ah, forgive my being so blunt," she added quickly. "We Americans *are* blunt, you know."

But the old lady blushed and looked pleased at her niece's outspoken admiration. She thought the girl looked like a picture herself, as she sat there with her flushed cheeks and shining eyes. Soon after this both ladies went to bed. But Miss Hardwicke was far too excited to sleep for some time. Indeed, she lay awake half the night thinking what an exquisite arrangement it would be if by-and-bye her godson and this charming young girl were to fall in love with and marry each other. And how, in that case, she would persuade them to make their home at the Manor, and would insist on doubling Chester's income—that is to say, if that somewhat *difficile* young man would listen to reason.

"Poor Chester," she thought compassionately; "he works so hard, and is so foolishly proud and obdurate about money matters. Very likely, while I am com-

fortably in bed, he is sitting wearily studying those dreadful law-books, and wearing himself to death, poor fellow." As a matter of fact, Chester Lennox was at that precise moment attending a convivial meeting at his club, with other choice spirits like unto himself—which meeting did not break up until an advanced hour in the morning. But his godmother, dear innocent soul, did not know this; so she continued her benevolent plans for the lightening of his arduous duties, and for his transformation into a Benedick, with an earnestness which would have amused him mightily could he have divined her thoughts. And as Aunt Clemency lay drowsily in the firelight, her thoughts hurried further and further into the future. Children's voices seemed to sound in the silent corridors; children's eyes smiled into hers. And then Miss Hardwicke fell asleep.

As the days went on the affection between aunt and niece became more firmly cemented than ever. Diana, if a little brusque in her manner at times, was a most intelligent and fascinating companion; and such of the *elite* of Dimsford who had called at the Manor since her arrival were pleased to observe that "she was a charming, unaffected girl." She had accompanied her aunt to one or two of the rather ponderous "social evenings" given by some of their nearest neighbours, and had looked exceedingly handsome and distinguished. Of course, as Diana was still in deep mourning for her father, she attended no more lively entertainments than decorous tea-parties and the like. The girls all declared her "a dear;" but—and at this they could not but marvel, and try to feel indignant—she had not been much sought after by any of the young men at those

gatherings. This, however, seemed to trouble her not at all. She liked girls twice as well as men, she declared ; they were far better fun.

When Diana had been nearly three weeks at the Manor, Chester Lennox arrived. He was a tall, well-made young man, very like his portrait, with a pleasant voice, and a smile which, if it was rare, was attractive enough when it did come to make one regret its rarity. He did not betray any excessive admiration of Diana ; indeed, much to his godmother's disappointment, he did not affect her society at all. Perhaps the girl felt his defection, for at first she seemed less gay and unconstrained in his presence, and rarely addressed him voluntarily. But this soon wore off, and she treated him in an off-hand cavalier fashion which annoyed him, and boded ill for the old lady's plans.

"What do you think of her, Chester?" asked Miss Hardwicke one afternoon, a few days after her godson's arrival, when Diana had gone to her room to write some letters.

"She is a handsome girl," he answered carelessly. "Rather free and easy in her manners, isn't she?"

"Oh, but in America girls are brought up differently, you know," Miss Hardwicke hastened to say in deprecating tones.

"Are they?" he answered drily. "They are brought up as ladies, I hope?"

"Why, Chester, of course. What do you mean?"

"Well," he said, carefully knocking the ash off his cigar (they were walking up and down the open space in front of the terrace), "I may be old-fashioned in my ideas, but I cordially detest fast, masculine girls, and I

think Miss Dare is at times the reverse of ladylike. For one thing, I happened to come down the east corridor a little way behind her this morning, when she suddenly caught her gown on the heel of her shoe, and nearly measured her length on the floor. Hastening to her assistance, I was petrified by hearing her use language which from the lips of a man would have been—well—*strong*, to say the least of it, but from a *lady*, was simply appalling. I never was so taken aback in my life. Of course she blushed, and stammered some excuse, but, by Jove, that sort of thing takes a good deal of excusing."

Miss Hardwicke looked troubled and uneasy.

"Yes, I remember I once did hear her say—er—'*confound it*,'" she said unwillingly; "but she seemed so sorry and ashamed directly, and explained that it was a bad habit she had got into, and that her poor father had frequently used these expressions. She promised not to do it again."

"It was not '*confound it*' she said upon this occasion," observed Mr. Lennox, calmly. "Nothing at all like it. Another thing, by the way. I found her in the stable-yard yesterday, laughing and joking in the most familiar manner with Jorkins" (Jorkins was the coachman). "Now," continued the young man seriously, "if—er—she doesn't know what good-breeding is, I think it is high time some one gave her a hint."

"You have taken a dislike to her, Chester," said his godmother, with a little sigh. "And I had hoped—had thought of your marrying her."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Lennox hastily; "I had as soon marry a circus rider!"

At this moment Diana herself, dressed for walking,

came down the steps from the terrace, her hands in the pockets of the short jacket she wore, her hat looking as though it had been pitched on anyhow, and her pretty lips puckered up into an unmistakable whistle. And what was more, the air she whistled savoured much more of the music-hall than of the drawing room.

"My dear!" exclaimed the old lady, aghast. Not at the air whistled, or its associations, but because the fact of a lady's whistling at all shocked her inexpressibly. Lennox's face expressed distinct, if polite, disapproval; and seeing this, Miss Dare took her hands out of her pockets, ceased whistling, and linked her arm lovingly in her aunt's.

"Ah, auntie, I am a sad tom-boy, I fear! *Do* tell me when I transgress the bounds of English young-ladyhood. You know," with a little sigh, "I have not had the advantages of most girls. Mr. Lennox," turning her great dark eyes towards him, "I know you are often shocked at my ways. Please don't hesitate to tell me when I say or do anything *very* dreadful."

Mr. Lennox replied somewhat stiffly, that he should not think of taking such a liberty, and raising his cap slightly, turned off in the direction of the gardens. Hardly had the echo of his footsteps on the gravelled walks died away, when a carriage was seen coming rapidly up the avenue. To Miss Hardwicke's surprise, the vehicle seemed to be loaded with luggage. It stopped at the hall-door, and a slight girlish figure in mourning got out. After a second or two one of the servants came forward, looking rather bewildered.

"Please ma'am," he said hesitatingly, addressing Miss Hardwicke, "this young lady says she is Miss Dare, and that you expect her."

"What!" exclaimed his mistress, in amazement.

Diana clasped her aunt's arm.

"Auntie!" she whispered breathlessly, "it is *that* girl—the one I told you of! The girl who travelled in the steamer with me."

"What incredible, what barefaced assurance!" uttered Miss Hardwicke. And quivering with indignation she advanced towards the new-comer, who was leisurely paying the cabman, but who, seeing the old lady approach, took a few steps towards her, and looked nervously and hesitatingly from her to Diana.

Miss Hardwicke bowed stiffly, and waited.

"Aunt Clemency, is it not?" said the girl, with an appearance of timidity.

"I do not understand you, I fear," replied the old lady, with much dignity.

"But, aunt, I am your niece, Diana Dare," said the stranger in faltering tones.

Miss Hardwicke turned to the flyman, who was assisting to remove the luggage.

"Let those boxes remain where they are," she said. Then to the new-comer, she went on icily:

"There must be some mistake, I think. This young lady," laying her hand on Diana's arm, "is my niece, Miss Dare."

The girl's face flushed, then turned deadly pale, and the scar Diana had spoken of stood out distinctly against her fair skin.

"Do you not remember me?" said Diana, with an accent of compassion in her fresh young voice, and a shocked, troubled look in her eyes.

"I—I never saw you before," stammered the other in some confusion.

But Miss Hardwicke had heard enough.

"You need not try to impose upon *me*, you shameless woman!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "I know who you are, and all about you! Go *at once*, or I shall send for a constable to remove you!"

The stranger looked considerably taken aback; then said in indignant tones:

"Certainly I shall go. I have no wish to intrude where I am not wanted. Good afternoon, madam." And with a slight bow she got into the fly again, and was driven rapidly away.

During dinner Mr. Lennox was informed of this bare-faced attempted imposture, and reproved Miss Dare gravely for having allowed herself to talk over and confide her family affairs with an utter stranger. Indeed his remarks upon the subject were so graphic and eloquent, that at their conclusion poor Diana, to her aunt's dismay, was discovered to be in tears.

"Oh, do forgive me, aunt," she sobbed hysterically. "I never thought of doing any harm. She seemed so friendly and innocent. I see now how very, *very* foolish I was." Then rising abruptly, she hurried from the room. Miss Hardwicke glanced at her godson reproachfully, and that gentleman himself looked rather uncomfortable.

Diana did not appear in the drawing-room for some time, and was very quiet and subdued all the rest of the evening. Chester did his best to make up for what he felt had been uncalled-for harshness, but without avail.

"You must forgive me," he said, quite touched by her evident dejection. "I did not mean to vex you so deeply. I spoke hastily, and perhaps a little unjustly."

"Oh, you were quite right," she answered, with a little sigh. She was sitting on a low chair near the fire; her hands clasped in her lap. She despised fancy-work of all kinds, and possessed the art of sitting perfectly idle in an easy and picturesque manner. Chester was certainly not in love with her; nevertheless, he could not but acknowledge that, if a little wanting in womanly grace and gentleness, she was, notwithstanding these deficiencies, a strikingly handsome young creature. And he had never seen her look so womanly as she did to-night.

When Miss Hardwicke awoke from her usual after-dinner nap, she proposed that—in accordance with a promise which it appeared she had made Diana some time ago—the famous diamonds should be unearthed from the safe, and brought downstairs. Accordingly Chester was entrusted with the key, and one of the servants summoned to assist him in bringing down the brass-bound box containing the jewels. They certainly were splendid diamonds, and as case after case was opened and their contents flashed and scintillated in the lamplight, Diana drew a deep breath of admiration.

"Oh, auntie, they are matchless—magnificent!" the astonished girl said in a low voice. "I have often heard my father speak of them, but I never dreamt they were anything like that."

The old lady was pleased at the evident impression her treasures created.

"Come here, my dear," she said, with a loving smile. And making the girl kneel before her, she clasped the superb necklet round the slender throat, and insisted on trying the effect of the whole suite. Even Chester

uttered an involuntary expression of intense admiration at the result. Diana's cheeks were flushed to a deep pink, her splendid eyes shone like stars under their thick lashes. The fiery jewels gleamed in her hair, in her ears, on waist, neck, arms, and fingers, contrasting effectively with the filmy black gown she wore, and flashing out quivering rays of light like a thousand fireflies. She looked like some eastern queen.

When the diamonds were again consigned to their velvet beds, Chester, at his godmother's request, took them upstairs again. Diana, who had quite recovered her usual good spirits, begged to be allowed to accompany him.

"I will help to carry the box," she said laughing; "and besides, I do so want to see the inside of that safe. You know, auntie, you said I might."

"What a curious key!" said Diana, watching attentively as Chester fitted it into the lock. "You have to press a little knob somewhere above, haven't you, before the key turns?"

"Yes," said Chester, smiling. "Who told you?"

"Auntie told me. She said no one knew the secret of it but herself and you. But as I am one of the family, she told me too." And Diana nodded her head with a pretty air of importance.

As she spoke the door of the safe swung slowly back, and Chester stepped in. The safe itself was let into the wall, and was about the size of a very small room. All the Hardwicke plate, except that in daily use, was ranged methodically on the shelves which lined the walls, and modestly muffled in chamois leather bags. The box containing the jewels had a special corner for itself.

Chester, having deposited the box in its corner, turned to his companion, who still stood in the corridor.

"Would you like to come in?" he said, holding out his hand, and feeling really vexed with himself for his unreasonable prejudice against this lovely girl, who seemed to try so hard, at times, to be gentle and conventional. "Take care. Neither you nor I can stand upright here."

Diana entered cautiously, for the ceiling *was* low, and Chester exerted himself so far as to unroll from their wrappings the curiously-chased punch-bowls, flagons, candlesticks, &c., and to relate the many quaint legends concerning them, which had descended, like the plate itself, through countless generations. Diana was deeply interested; but the lock, with its concealed spring and curious action, seemed to take her fancy almost more than anything. She made Lennox show her the working of the spring again and again, and thanked him very prettily as they went slowly down the broad staircase together. And he, strangely-constituted young man, felt obdurately conscious that in spite of her beauty and winsome ways he certainly did not like her. At least—well, he was not quite sure. And Diana, naughty Diana, was smiling mischievously. Why?

For two days after the "diamond show," as Diana called it, her aunt noticed that she always made a point of meeting the postman, morning and evening, at the foot of the avenue. On the third day she entered the morning-room just after breakfast with rather a heightened colour, and with an open letter in her hand. Miss Hardwicke was alone, Chester having gone round to the stables. Diana handed her aunt a small bundle of letters;

then nervously twisting the paper she held, she said in a low voice :

“Auntie, may I speak to you about something?”

“Certainly, my dear. You do not need to ask that, I should think. What is it, child?”

The girl hesitated, then said frankly :

“I have something to tell you, auntie. Something I ought to have told you before.”

Miss Hardwicke looked vaguely alarmed.

“Well, dear?” she said anxiously.

“I—I ought to have told you before now,” stammered the girl, “that—that I have a lover—that I am engaged to be married!”

The old lady did not speak for a few moments. She was conscious of a keen pang of disappointment ; for she thought she had observed an alteration in her godson’s manner to the wayward Diana during the last few days, and had hoped great things. For was not that love the most lasting which began with “a little aversion”? Then a sudden hope inspired her.

“My dear,” leaning eagerly forward, “is it—is it *Chester*?”

“*Chester*?” repeated Diana. Then the excitable girl burst into a wild peal of hysterical laughter. “Oh, forgive me,” she gasped, controlling herself with an effort. “But I could not help thinking how disgusted poor Mr. Lennox would be if you suggested that he even admired me! Oh, no. He—my lover—his name is Clarence Lorimer. He is a good bit older than I am, and,” shyly, “*very* fond of me. Father liked him.”

Miss Hardwicke’s interest was aroused.

“My nephew approved of the engagement, then?”

she said. "But, Diana, why did you not tell me before?"

"We agreed to keep it a secret," said the girl simply, "until Clarence could make a home for me. Father thought it best. But I have just had this letter from him, in which he says—— But please read it, auntie."

"Oh, my dear," said the old lady, much pleased; "but—Mr. Lorimer? Will he like that?"

"Oh, yes. I've told him all about you, and how *very* good you have been to me."

So Miss Hardwicke put on her spectacles, and read Diana's love-letter. It was a tender, manly epistle, and sensible withal. Miss Hardwicke felt sure she should like the writer.

"You sly little puss!" she said, as she folded it up. "So that was the reason you always met the postman." Then after a minute, "Diana, do you think Mr. Lorimer would care to come here for a little time? He would find it quiet, of course, for Chester leaves us in a few days; but," mischievously, "perhaps you could manage to amuse him, eh?"

Diana's face flushed with pleasure.

"Oh, auntie, do you mean it?"

"Of course, my dear. You are my child now; and where should you receive your affianced husband if not here? He is in Liverpool, he says, does he not? I shall write a little note for you to enclose in yours. My dear, dear child, I trust you may be very happy." And the old lady drew the girl into her arms, and kissed her.

Diana's *fiancé* wrote to say he would be delighted to visit Dimsford Manor; and he arrived within twenty-four hours after his letter. He was a tall, powerfully-built

man of about forty, dark, and of a rather coarse expression of countenance. Lennox mentally set him down "a cad"; and even Miss Hardwicke felt a strong shock of disappointment, and sighed as she contrasted him with her distinguished-looking godson. I may as well acknowledge, by the way, that the latter made himself as disagreeable to the new-comer as a gentleman can be without ceasing to be a gentleman. But Mr. Lorimer did not seem to resent this at all; indeed, it appeared to amuse him rather than otherwise. He had an oily, suave manner, too, peculiarly aggravating to Chester, who, for his part, wondered what any girl could see in the fellow. Not that he had the slightest feeling of jealousy in the matter; on the contrary, in spite of his late efforts to "do the polite" to Diana, he felt himself more unaccountably repelled by that young lady than ever. Nor did the following little scene tend to increase his respect for her. One warm sunny afternoon he came upon the engaged pair in a lonely part of the wood. They did not see him, and continued their conversation uninterrupted. He observed, to his disgust, that Diana was smoking—not a cigarette, as he knew she frequently did, *sub rosa*—but a very well-flavoured cigar. She was apparently enjoying it, too, as, seated on the grass, she leaned against a tree, with her arms folded, and her hat tilted over her eyes, apparently listening attentively to what her *fiancé* was saying. Suddenly she removed the cigar from her rosy lips, and made some remark, of course inaudible to Chester, which seemed to amuse Mr. Lorimer mightily. He burst into a roar of laughter, and slapping his future bride heartily on the shoulder, exclaimed in tones expressive of keen enjoyment, "Good, for you, little one! By Jove—good, for you!"

The unseen spectator of this lover-like caress curled his lip contemptuously. If Diana had been easy-going and fast before Mr. Lorimer's arrival, she was ten times worse now. Nay, at times she positively seemed to go out of her way to do and say the most unladylike things. For instance, in coming downstairs that very morning, Chester had seen her chuck Eliza Jane—the pretty waiting-maid—under the chin, with a sly wink which would not have done discredit to a British Dragoon; much to that damsel's indignation. Poor Diana, by the way, was not a favourite with the servants at the Manor, who considered her "no lady," principally because she scoffed at the idea of a lady's-maid, and kept all her belongings scrupulously under lock and key. The "fast" young lady was just coming into vogue at the time of which I write, and the type had always aroused Chester's supreme and unmitigated contempt. But Diana carried it a shade further than any woman he knew. Even this cad, it appeared, did not respect her, Lennox thought scornfully. He was turning away in haughty disgust, wondering how his gentle refined godmother could be so infatuated with her very *prononcée* niece, when a remark in Diana's clear distinct tones arrested him. It was only the first words he heard; the rest were in a low rapid undertone. Whatever their import was, it drove the blood from Chester Lennox's face, and he deliberately leaned against a tree, and—listened!

That night at dinner Lennox said carelessly, addressing his godmother:

"I have to go up to town in the morning. Have you any commissions for me?"

"Yes, my dear, I think so. I will make out a little list

of some things I want, if you will be so good as to get them for me. When shall you return?" she went on.

"Oh, the day after to-morrow," he answered. "I have rather a particular engagement to-morrow night."

"It will be horribly slow without you," said Diana, with a little shake of her close-cropped head.

"Will it?" said Mr. Lennox, disagreeably and curtly. "I must hope to make it more lively for you on my return."

Next morning Lennox took his departure by the early train. Diana, having got up an hour earlier than her wont, poured out his coffee for him, and waved her handkerchief from the doorstep as he drove down the avenue. The first of which attentions the recipient acknowledged very ungraciously, and the last, not at all.

The day passed as usual. Miss Hardwicke retired early, having a slight cold; and Diana brought her a tumbler of hot port wine negus, after the old lady was in bed. She fancied her niece looked pale and tired. Certainly she was unusually silent.

Shortly after two o'clock, when the old house was wrapped in sleep and silence, a little group of four men quietly skirted the laurels on the east side of the house, and took up their position in a shadowed corner of a heavy buttress, near the window of the morning-room.

The watch-dog, which was always loosed at night, began to bark wildly, then became suddenly silent. In the hush that followed, one of the men gave a low, peculiar whistle. He was standing just under the morning-room window, his figure but dimly visible in the pale starlight. His companions remained like statues in the deep shadow. In a few moments the window was

cautiously opened—it was low, barely four feet from the ground—and a hoarse voice whispered :

“Is all right? Have you fixed the dog? It’s deuced dark. Turn on your lantern.”

“All’s right. Be quick,” was the almost inaudible answer from below.

“Catch, then.”

Whereupon three good-sized bags were handed out, slowly and carefully—for they appeared to be heavy—and were silently received and deposited on the ground by the man outside. Then, one after the other, two figures, a man’s and a woman’s, swung themselves noiselessly from the window. But ere their feet touched the ground, the man who awaited them raised his hand, and almost simultaneously his hitherto motionless and unseen companions sprang forward, and surrounding the descending couple, in less than half a minute handcuffed them both securely. The light of a bull’s-eye lantern, which was immediately levelled on their faces, showed the man to be Clarence Lorimer, and the woman—Diana Dare.

An awful oath burst from Lorimer’s lips.

“It’s all up, Bill,” he muttered, addressing his *fiancée*, who was struggling fiercely, and making use of the most appalling language.

“As neat a job as ever I managed,” remarked the man who had whistled, and who was, in fact, a spry-looking detective from Scotland Yard. “And we have to thank you, Mr. Lennox, for the capture of a gang of as thorough-going scoundrels as we’ve had our eye on for a long time—father, son, and pal.”

“Oh, you’re a wily one, you are!” one of the constables was saying admiringly to Lorimer. “But you’re not

quite so wily as you ought to be. We've nabbed your pal, too. You'll find him waiting for you where you're going."

"Sure, but it's the pretty gurl ye make, Bill," the other constable was saying with a grin to his prisoner. "By the powers, now, I'd almost like to kiss ye meself. It was a forlorn widow you were the last time, wasn't it?"

Here Lennox, who had been interchanging a few rapid words with the detective, turned to "Diana," who was regarding him with panting breath, and vengeful eyes.

"My good boy," he said drily, "spare us any more bad language. Yours was a splendid scheme, and admirably carried out—so far. But, Mr. Bill Davis, or whatever your own name may be, *next* time you and your father have any little game of the kind on hand, let me advise you, merely as a precaution, not to discuss your plans in the open air, unless you are sure there is no one within hearing." Then, turning to the constables, he continued, "Take the fellows round to the hall-door, men. I will climb in here, and open it for you." As he spoke he swung himself up to the window-sill in the semi-darkness, and disappeared into the room. The constables obeyed, and conveying their prisoners with their precious booty into the house, watched them with grim vigilance until the morning.

No words can express Miss Hardwicke's speechless, incredulous dismay, when she awoke from her drugged sleep and heard her godson's tale. At first she absolutely refused to believe in the treachery of the girl whom she had loved so warmly, and who now turned out to be no girl at all. She insisted on rising at once; and com-

manded that the prisoners should not be removed until she had seen them.

"I won't believe it, Chester," she said piteously, as he gave her his arm downstairs. "I can't believe it, unless she tells me herself. A *boy!*" hysterically. "Oh, it is impossible!"

The *ci-devant* Diana, otherwise Mr. Bill Davis, was seated sullenly on the table in the morning-room. At the sight of the handcuffs on the shapely white wrists, Miss Hardwicke's lips trembled.

"Is it—is it true what they tell me?" the old lady faltered, looking wistfully at the handsome, averted face, "that—that you are—that man's—*son?*"

There was a pause, then the boy raised his head.

"Yes," he answered huskily, "it is quite true. I've deceived you all along. We met the girl, your niece, on board the steamer; and the little fool told me all her history, and about you, and—you know the rest. Of course that day she came here she didn't recognise me in women's clothes, and—I kept back all the letters that came afterwards from Southport. You—you've been mortally kind to me, and—and——" Here the boy stopped, bit his lip violently, and threw back his head.

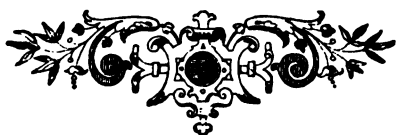
"Shut up, you young fool," growled his worthy father.

"Take me away, Chester," said the old lady faintly.

I will only add that in the course of a few days the poor little *bonâ fide* Diana (who had gone back to her mother's friends) was brought by Mr. Lennox, after many explanations and apologies, back to Dimsford. But Miss Hardwicke did not "take" to her, as she had done to her clever personator, and met all the girl's half-shy advances with a cold reluctant kindness, mentally

contrasting her pale little face and slight figure with the splendid physique and beautiful though deceitful eyes of the other Diana. Nor did she cease to remind her that if she had not forgotten herself so far as to "strike up an acquaintance"—such was the old lady's phrase—with a strange young man on board a steamer, all this trouble would have been avoided.

However, if Miss Hardwicke did not appreciate her grand-niece, it is satisfactory to know that Mr. Chester Lennox infinitely preferred her to her predecessor. Indeed, he showed his predilection so strongly that he ultimately prevailed upon her to marry him, from which we may conclude that the attraction was mutual. But—they did not reside at Dimsford Manor.



IN SOME OTHER WORLD.



IN SOME OTHER WORLD.



'Mind may act upon mind, though bodies be far divided,
For the life is in the blood, but souls communicate unseen.'

Martin Tupper.

THEY met for the first time—on earth—in a crowded ball-room ; and—but stay, I anticipate slightly.

She, Gladys, was seated in the shady gloom of a balcony overlooking the street, but made fragrant and retired by banks of perfume-shedding flowers. She was tired, and had asked her partner to leave her to rest awhile. As she lay back in the cushioned seat—the balmy air of the summer night fanning her forehead, the dreamy rhythm of the music mingling with the ceaseless roar of London in her ears—a sense of drowsiness took possession of her, from which she was gradually aroused by the curious conviction, familiar to most of us, that a gaze as yet unseen was bent upon her. She moved restlessly, for she had thought herself alone ; then, raising her head, she became aware that at the extreme end of the balcony, which ran along six wide windows, a tall, well-made man was leaning, his head bent slightly

forward, his eyes fixed on hers. His face was not in the shadow, but Gladys saw nothing but the eyes. Steady, piercing, concentrated, they compelled her gaze; and as she gazed she felt an indefinable sense of unreality, of *bodilessness* come over her. Her soul seemed floating into space. Then she became conscious that a hand held hers, and that a voice spoke to her. Still she seemed floating on—on—into nothingness, and looking upwards, she again seemed to meet the steady gaze of those strange eyes.

"We have met before," said the voice.

"Where?" she heard herself say.

"In some other world," was the answer.

Then she struggled back to consciousness. She was still on the balcony, and the last few bars of the waltz still quivered on the air. She had not moved, she knew, for a spray of *stephanotis*, which had lain on her knee when she passed into her brief trance, lay there still. The stranger stood where she had first seen him, but his eyes were bent upon the ground. His face, his figure, his very attitude, seemed illusively familiar to her. *Where* had she seen him before?

Later in the evening, as she was returning from the supper-room on the arm of her *fiancé*, Bernard Campbell, her hostess approached her with a tall, distinguished-looking man in her wake.

"Miss Raynor," she said with a smile, "allow me to introduce Mr. Harcourt Kennard."

Gladys looked up to meet the same pair of penetrating dark grey eyes which had so startled her on the balcony. *Compelling* eyes they were, with the look of quiet power about them which characterized the whole face. Not a

handsome face, but strong (if severe), with lips that could soften into wonderful sweetness, as they were doing now. His hair and moustache were brown, heavily tinged with grey. In age he looked considerably over thirty.

What he saw was a slender, fair-haired, blue-eyed girl of perhaps twenty, her face not so much beautiful as *spirituelle*, and indicative of a highly-strung nervous temperament and markedly keen susceptibilities. As their eyes met she started, then turned a shade paler.

"You will waltz with me?" he said in a very low voice.

It was not the request of a stranger, it was rather the acceptance of a foregone conclusion by a tried and privileged friend. She acquiesced, after a moment's hardly perceptible hesitation, and they were soon gliding among the swaying dancers. Neither spoke until the dance was ended, and it seemed to both that it was an unusually short one.

"Have we met before?" she asked, looking up at him with troubled, puzzled eyes, as he led her to a secluded part of the sultry fragrant conservatory.

"Have we?" he queried gravely.

"Never to my knowledge," she said in slow, doubtful tones; "and yet your face seems strangely familiar to me."

"It may be that we *have* met before," he returned in a very low voice. "If not in this world—in another."

He had seated himself on a low chair near to her, and was slowly furling and unfurling her fan, his eyes on the ground. At his words she started violently, then recovering herself, she said with a half smile:

"In a previous existence, perhaps."

"It may be so," he answered. And as he spoke, she felt his eyes concentrate themselves on hers, felt the same dreamy unconsciousness overcoming her as before.

"Don't!" she said quickly. "Don't! Why do you look at me so?"

"I cannot tell you," he answered, in a strange, far-away voice. "You spoke of a previous existence. I feel I am risking your just displeasure at my presumption when I say that it seems to me as though—when or where I know not, in some other planet, perhaps—*you had once belonged to me.*"

Her face crimsoned. She rose, with an indescribably haughty gesture of her pretty head.

"You presume indeed, Mr. Kennard," she said quietly. "Will you kindly take me back to the ball-room?"

He had risen also, and they stood facing one another.

"Forgive me," he said, turning rather pale.

She did not answer, for she was angry. And yet it was a troubled, startled, unwilling anger, too.

"Do you believe in the doctrine of re-incarnation?" he asked abruptly, after a short pause, during which Miss Raynor's anger became somewhat modified.

"You mean?" she said, without looking at him.

"I mean," he answered steadily, "do you believe that certain souls—spirits—what you will—inhabit successive bodies, pass into other planets, meet and recognize each other in successive existences, and belong to each other for all time?"

No one was near; a tiny fountain plashed in the near distance; the music sounded far away, like music heard in a dream. Gladys shivered slightly, then she raised her eyes to her companion's.

A faint, hardly perceptible agitation swept over his features.

"*Do you remember?*" he said in low, intense tones, bending slightly towards her.

She put both hands to her head with a low startled cry.

"Ah, don't!" she faltered in a bewildered kind of way. "I do remember, vaguely, indefinitely—but—I do not know what it is that I remember."

A curious smile flitted across his lips; but he only said, and his voice grew deep and shaken:

"In this world, at least, we may be friends, may we not?"

"Friends," she repeated dreamily. "Friends! Yes." As she spoke she held out her hand to him. His fingers closed over hers for a brief second, then he said quietly:

"Thank you. We may both need a friend."

At this moment Miss Raynor's partner for the next dance appeared in search of her, and with a grave bow Kennard turned away.

The season went on, and they met frequently. Gladys was to be married in September. Bernard Campbell, her *fiancé*, was a man in a good position, and of good family. He was rather a cold, stern wooer, perhaps, but he loved his bride-to-be very sincerely, her father approved of him very highly, and she had known him all her life. She had never asked herself whether she loved him or not—until lately. He was good to look at, generous and intellectual, besides being wealthy and influential, and Gladys had hitherto accepted her fate willingly enough. But of late a curious unrest had possessed her, and it dated from the night of her compact

of friendship with Harcourt Kennard. She wondered that she had never noticed before how cold, how unsympathetic Bernard was. But he was so good, so honourable, so much all he ought to be in every way. She *ought* to love him very much, she thought remorsefully. But—*did* she? Now, a man has not touched a woman's heart very nearly when she has to sum up to herself reasons *why* she ought to love him, and Bernard, who was not so cold as he looked, used to watch her anxiously at this time. He was far from being a demonstrative lover, but he was human, and he could not but feel a pang of disappointment at the evident distaste with which she shrank now from his lightest caress, even from the kiss of greeting and farewell which was surely his as her lover and future husband. Had she ever loved him? he wondered, or had her sleeping heart only been content and indifferent, because unawakened?

The season had come to an end. Fashionable London was comparatively empty and deserted. Piccadilly and Regent Street were easily navigable without the aid of eyes in the back of one's head, and the office of the mounted policemen in the Row was decidedly a sinecure. The wearied slaves of pleasure and conventionality had dispersed to seaside, or country, or foreign towns, as their tastes inclined. Among those who did none of these things was Harcourt Kennard. He was a rising barrister, and devoted himself to his profession with a resolute determined ardour which could hardly fail to bring him success. That it was the long vacation made no difference to him; he had neither the time nor the money, he said, to waste in holiday-making. His chums at the Bar shrugged their shoulders; but Kennard had

a drain upon his income which none of his friends suspected. As a matter of fact, no one knew much about him, for he was unusually reticent upon subjects relating to himself. He did not look like a happy man, women said. Nor was he.

This summer, however, contrary to his usual custom, he accepted an invitation from an old college friend to go down into Somersetshire for a few days. Among the other guests were Gladys Raynor and Bernard Campbell. A well-known writer on mesmerism joined the party on the day following Kennard's arrival. He appeared much interested in the latter, and soon found him almost as ardent a disciple of mesmerism and its attendant phenomena as he was himself.

"Your face betokens singular power of will, Mr. Kennard," he said to him on the second evening, as they stood together in a deep window recess. "Have you ever exercised the mesmeric influence you so undoubtedly possess?"

"Often," answered the other, with a sudden, quick contraction of his brows.

"Have you ever failed?"

"Never," was the brief reply.

"Ah! I thought not. I should like you to try your power on some of the guests here to-night."

"No, not to-night," said Kennard hurriedly. "I don't feel up to it."

"Don't you? You ought to. Give me your hand."

The other complied, with a short laugh.

Mr. Virrel held it for a few moments, then slowly let it go.

"You will oblige me, will you not?" he said then.

"Very well," replied Kennard, speaking half to himself.
"Yes, if you wish it."

Mr. Virrel's suggestion met with general approval. The hostess, a pretty, excitable young woman, was the first subject, much against her husband's wishes. But she was a self-willed little dame, and took her own way. Kennard had desired that the room might be perfectly silent. Mrs. Carden laughed a little at first, then by slow degrees her beautiful eyes became fastened upon Kennard's—wavered, closed. She was completely in his power, and obeyed him implicitly in all he told her to do or say, until her husband angrily interfered, and Kennard released her. Several other guests volunteered, and in spite of evident disbelief, yielded with more or less difficulty to the spell cast over them by Kennard. Campbell, who was a confirmed sceptic, scornfully refused to take part in any such folly, as he called it, and stood apart with an expression of haughty boredom on his handsome face, until Mr. Virrel approached Gladys.

"Miss Raynor," said the latter gentleman, "will you test Mr. Kennard's power?"

But before she could answer, Kennard said hurriedly, "Miss Raynor will excuse me. I have exhausted my powers."

Gladys flashed a quick grateful glance at him. He was leaning against the mantelshelf, his face deadly pale, his eyes bent on the ground. In a few minutes he left the room, and was seen no more that night. As the door closed after him, Gladys, half-rising, met her lover's eyes, full of an amazed, severe displeasure. She flushed crimson, and sank back into her chair. But he had noted the burning blush, and the expression in her eyes

as they rested on Kennard. He said nothing, but from that night a wild bitter jealousy raged in his heart, and robbed him of peace and rest.

During the evening Mr. Virrel said to Gladys :

"I feel certain you are *clairvoyante*, Miss Raynor. Do let me try if I am right."

He was so confident and so importunate that she yielded. But greatly to his surprise and discomfiture, she did not come under his influence at all.

On the following morning Kennard returned to town.

Time went on. Half September had gone, and it was within a fortnight of Gladys Raynor's wedding day. The weather had been for some days sultry and oppressive, and to-night a thunderstorm seemed imminent. Harcourt Kennard sat in his chambers in the Temple. The windows were wide open to the night, though the air without was as suffocatingly breathless as within. His usually busy pen was still, his books were pushed aside, and before him lay an open letter. It was from Gladys Raynor, and contained only a few words, thanking her "friend" for the handsome bracelet he had sent her as a wedding gift. Her *friend*, he thought bitterly, only her friend. Nothing more. He had not seen her since they parted in Somersetshire. He had not dared. For he knew that he loved her, madly, passionately—and in a few short days she would be Bernard Campbell's wife. He had fought against his passion manfully, but it held him still. A maddening, overwhelming desire was upon him to-night to hear her voice once more, to look into her eyes, to touch her hand. The mad, wild longing seemed to take possession of him, and shook his very soul.

"Ah, my darling, my little Gladys," he groaned half aloud, "come to me! I cannot live without you. *Gladys—come to me!*" He hardly knew what he said; his whole being vibrated with his fierce delirium of mingled passion and despair. He let his head fall forward on his arms, and sat quite still for a long time. And as he sat there in such bitter suffering as a man rarely knows but once in a lifetime, there came to him again the strange haunting conviction that once—*when*, he could not know, somewhere—*where*, he dared not think, before time was, perhaps, or in some unknown world—they had been all in all to each other; and his soul cried out now that she should not be his, but another's.

The hour of midnight boomed out on the overcharged air, and still he had not moved. The thunderstorm had burst with terrific fury; the fierce lightning played upon the walls, and paled the flickering lamp upon the table into insignificance; the long pent-up rain swept in at the open windows. But Kennard heeded none of those things. For a deadlier, fiercer storm was raging in his own heart.

Suddenly, in a pause between the thunder-claps, he heard a light footstep ascending the stairs, a hand on the lock of the door. He raised his head, and wearily swept the hair off his forehead. The door slowly opened and shut, and a slender girlish figure, enveloped in a long fur cloak, advanced into the room, her face deathly pale, even through the thick veil she wore, her clothes drenched and clinging about her. Kennard rose to his feet; but a sudden overpowering giddiness obliged him to lean against the table for support. Was he dreaming, or was it Gladys Raynor whom he saw? She came

slowly but unwaveringly towards him, her hands half-extended, her eyes fixed on his.

"I have come," she said in a low monotone, as of one who talked in her sleep. "You called me. I am here. What do you want with me?"

For a few minutes Kennard literally could not speak. He gazed at her—stupefied. Then, with a mighty effort, he said hoarsely,

"Gladys! What have I done—what have I done? Child, it is *madness* for you to be here."

He took her hand as he spoke and placed her gently in a chair, for she was trembling violently. She submitted passively while he unfastened her cloak and removed her hat, but she pushed away the wine he brought her.

"Take it," he said entreatingly; "you are faint and exhausted. It will do you good."

She obeyed him silently.

"Did you meet any one?" he said then in low, agitated tones. "How did you get in?"

"I do not know how I got in," she murmured. "I met no one. I think not."

"Thank Heaven!" he ejaculated in a disturbed kind of way.

She looked wildly around her, sprang to her feet, and burst into hysterical sobs.

"Oh, *what* must you think of me?" she cried. "What have I done? Something *made* me come. Something *compelled* me. Ah, believe me!"

"Tell me," he said in a carefully suppressed voice. "Tell me how it was, and try to calm yourself. Then you must let me take you home." As he spoke he put

her gently back into her chair again, and seated himself at some distance from her.

"I was sitting alone," she faltered with trembling lips. "Bernard had just gone. I had begged him to release me from our engagement. I had told him I would rather *die* than marry him; but he refused—he said it was too late; and I was *very* miserable. Then—quite suddenly—I heard your voice call me. You said—ah! I cannot tell you what you said—but I felt I *must* come. I could not help it."

A fierce, ungovernable joy filled Kennard's heart; but he only said, controlling his voice with an effort:

"And did you walk all the way in that storm, poor little child?"

"Yes," shuddering, "all the way. I did not know which way to go, but an invisible hand seemed to lead me. I only felt that you called me, that you wanted me, and that I must come."

Kennard had grown very white.

"Gladys"—he said huskily and without looking at her, "you say I called you. Tell me—what I said."

"No, no, I cannot," she replied, a burning blush covering her hitherto pale cheeks.

He turned his eyes on hers.

"Tell me," he said, speaking almost in a whisper.

She wavered, then said, almost inaudibly:

"The voice—I heard—it seemed to say—'*Gladys—come to me! I—cannot live—without you!*'"

Kennard's breath came thick and short; his lips, under his heavy moustache, were white and dry. For a minute he did not speak. Then he said, indistinctly and brokenly:

"Gladys, forgive me. I *did* say those words—I *did* call you in my wretchedness—in my intolerable misery. My soul called to yours—and oh! my darling," hoarsely, "*yours answered me!*"

Again there was a short silence, broken only by the roar of the rushing rain outside.

"Gladys"—he went on, in a voice shaken by passion, the words seeming wrung from him against his will, "I believe in the sight of Heaven we belong to each other!"

She looked up into his haggard face imploringly.

"Ah, don't—don't!" she gasped. "You forget—you forget!"

He covered his face with his hands.

"Ah, yes," he muttered, "I forget! You do not know—how much!"

Then, almost sternly:

"Come—let me take you home."

"Pardon my intrusion at such an interesting crisis," said a cold clear voice from the doorway; and the next moment Bernard Campbell strode into the room, his eyes dark with fury, his face grey and drawn as though with physical pain. "I have no longer the slightest wish, Miss Raynor, to control your actions in any way," he went on in the same curiously quiet voice. "You asked me to-night to release you from your engagement. You have your wish—you are free!"

He turned as if to go. He had not taken the smallest notice of Kennard, who stood motionless, speechless, his face stern and set, as though carved in stone. Gladys sprang to her feet.

"Bernard!" she gasped, "what—*what* do you mean?"

"I mean this," he said, with an inflection of bitter scorn in his clear tones, "that a woman who, as my promised wife, can so far forget herself as to visit another man's rooms—alone—at midnight—is no wife for me! That—"

With a furious exclamation Kennard sprang towards him, then stopped short, and bit his lip violently. For was not this man the affianced husband of the woman he so dearly loved?

"You must be mad, Campbell!" he exclaimed in thick, husky tones. "For Heaven's sake, think what you are saying. This—this meeting is a pure accident, for which I alone am to blame. If you will let me explain, you will see that—that——" He stopped. Campbell had walked to the mantelpiece, and now stood leaning against it, a bitter smile curving his white lips. A stranger would have thought him almost calm, so impassive was the cold, handsome face. Not even Gladys guessed the white heat of passion which smouldered under this icy self-possession.

"I await your explanation, Mr. Kennard," he said in a voice almost deadly in its unnatural quietness.

Kennard paused, mentally cursing his own mad folly, which had brought such cruel insult and suspicion on the name of the woman who, even in his thoughts, was so sacred to him. *How* could he explain? How could he expect to be believed? Would *he* believe such a tale, were he in Campbell's place? Most assuredly *not*!

"Listen," he said almost fiercely. "I—I love Miss Raynor. You, who know her so well, will forgive me so much. To-night, I—" He paused. Again the evil sneer rested on Campbell's lips.

"I see," he said in icy tones, turning his eyes again upon Gladys, who stood horror-stricken, with dark dilating eyes and quick-drawn breath. "I see. I quite understand. You love Miss Raynor. And she loves you. And she has come here to-night to tell you so. Well—I will not interrupt such tender confidences. I—"

"Good God!" broke in Kennard violently. "What do you mean? Be silent, and hear me, or I swear I will kill you!"

"Pardon me," returned the other with a pale smile, "I have heard enough, and more than enough. When Miss Raynor asked me to-night to release her from her engagement to me, I did not realize, unhappily, what good reason she had for her request. I realize it now, and beg to resign my rights in your favour. I consider myself fortunate in that I was prompted to follow her to-night. Permit me to leave you together." With a slight contemptuous bow which included both, he went towards the door.

But Kennard could control himself no longer. With a muttered curse, he flung himself at Campbell's throat, and bore him furiously backwards. But the next instant, Gladys, with a bitter, agonized cry, threw herself between them.

"Harcourt!" she shrieked, "for *my* sake!"

Kennard's arms fell to his sides; his hands were clenched, his breathing was laboured and uneven. For a moment the two men glared at each other, then with a look at Gladys that she never forgot—so intense, so full of bitter scorn and contempt was it—Campbell turned slowly and went out. As the door closed, Kennard

leaned back against the wall, like one struck by a heavy blow.

"My darling—my darling!" he muttered deliriously, scarce knowing what he said. "To what insults have I subjected you! Can you ever forgive me?"

"I must go home," she said, pushing back her hair confusedly, and speaking almost in a whisper. "You will take me home? Now—*now!* At once!"

"Yes—yes—I will take you home," he answered agitatedly. "But first—tell me—is it *true* that you asked him to release you? Do you not love him, then?" The last words were almost inaudible. He had come quite close to her, and stood with folded arms, looking down into her eyes. But he did not attempt to touch her, not even to take her hand.

"*Love* him!" she cried wildly. "No—no! I have known for a long time that I never loved him. I thank Heaven that I am free. But—but his bitter insulting words make me feel—make me feel—" Her voice quivered into a sob.

Kennard turned from her with a low, inarticulate cry, and throwing himself into a chair, he covered his face with his hands. For one moment Gladys hesitated; then she went swiftly towards him, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Harcourt!" she said tremulously, and his pulses thrilled at the sound of his name from her lips, "do not be so grieved. I know *you* are not to blame, dear. It was all my own folly. Harcourt—why do you look at me so? What is it that you fear? You have said you love me. Is it that you think I do not love you? Ah—for a long, long time—"

He started to his feet.

"Stay!" he said hoarsely. "Hush, my darling—do not say it! It is true that I love you. But I dare not offer you my love—dare not hope for the mad joy of yours in return. For—ah! God help me!—I am *married!*"

For quite a minute there was silence.

"*Married!*" she echoed then, half-stupidly. "*Married!* Ah, no—not *that!*" Her eyes met his with an agonized terrified appeal that pierced his heart. He turned away with a gesture of despair.

"What must you think of me?" she murmured with white lips. "You are married—and yet you dare to speak to me of love! Ah, what must you think of me? How low I must have fallen in your sight!" Large tears rolled over her cheeks.

"Don't!" he said indistinctly. "Child, don't cry."

She had begun mechanically to fasten her cloak, and he helped her with nervous, trembling fingers.

"Gladys," he said imploringly, "say—that you forgive me!"

"Hush!" she answered in dull, passionless tones. "Hush! Don't speak to me—yet!"

Together—silently—they descended the stairs, and went out into the court below. The rain still fell heavily, and plashed monotonously in the fountain. At intervals a peal of thunder rolled in the distance. Neither spoke until they reached the street, then Kennard said almost harshly:

"We had better call a hansom. I will go with you to your own door. Nay," as she made a gesture of dissent, "allow me so much grace. I must justify myself in your eyes. Then I will trouble you no more."

And as they drove through the rain-washed streets, he told her, in a few broken sentences, the story of his marriage. It was the old pitiful story of a boy's mad infatuation for a woman grievously beneath him in every way—of a hasty private marriage, as hastily repented of.

"My infatuation did not last long," he went on bitterly. "I had scarcely been married for two months when I discovered that the woman to whom I had given my name was coarse-minded, illiterate, intemperate, and—more degrading than all—unfaithful. It was my money, my position she loved—not me. Then came terrible scenes. I shudder when I think of her face as I came to know it then, of her brutal taunts, her— But pah! Why do I pollute your innocent ears with such details? We parted—I agreeing to pay her a certain sum yearly, as the price of my comparative freedom. She was quite content. That was ten years ago. I have never seen her since." He stopped, for he was terribly agitated and could hardly command his voice.

"All those years," he went on after a minute, "her allowance has been drawn with unfailing regularity. But this summer, my solicitor tells me, no application has been made. The money has hitherto been paid at a small village in Wales, but from inquiries which I have caused to be made, I learn that she is no longer there. At times, of late, I have allowed myself to indulge in the hope that she no longer lives. But"—between his set teeth—"the she-devil is not likely to die. If I could *know* that I were free. But, oh, my God! I may *never* know! I have spoiled your life," he went on in shaking tones; "and you have spoken no word of reproach. I have stood by and heard you insulted. I have insulted

you myself by the mere mention of my love for you. Child, you do not know how I have battled against it—tried to conquer it! And to-night I have undone it all," he exclaimed with sudden passion. "I must have been mad—*mad!*"

Gladys had not spoken. He knew that she was weeping.

"Say one kind word to me," he said brokenly. "Say that you forgive me."

Just then the cab stopped.

"Ah, yes," she breathed, leaning slightly towards him. "I forgive you. But—you have broken my heart!"

Then they parted. And Kennard paced the streets in the pitiless soaking rain until the busy life of London had begun with the morning.

* * * * *

Mr. George Virrel occupied a pleasant set of rooms a little way from Piccadilly. He had just finished dinner one evening, some few days after the events narrated above, when a visitor was announced—Mr. Kennard.

"My dear fellow," said Virrel genially, "I am indeed glad to see you. Sit down. Have a cigar, and help yourself to claret."

The two men had met frequently of late, and a warm friendship had sprung up between them.

"Thanks, no; I won't take anything," replied Kennard, striking a match rather absently, without, however, lighting the cigar he held.

"You are in trouble, I fear," observed Virrel, regarding him keenly. "You look ill and haggard."

"I am not ill," returned the other shortly. "At least

nothing to speak of. But—I am in great trouble. I have come to you for advice and help.”

“I shall be glad to give you both, if I can,” said his companion quietly. “But it is a difficult problem.”

Kennard started, and threw away his unlighted cigar.

“What do you mean?” he said. “Do you know—?”

“I know almost all you would tell me,” returned Virrel, carefully dissecting a walnut as he spoke. “At least I have heard a good deal, and I can guess the rest.”

“What have you heard?” said the other, rising and taking a few rapid turns up and down the room.

“I have heard that Miss Raynor’s engagement is broken off, though it wants little more than a week of the day fixed for her marriage. That her father, being furious, has vowed to keep her boxed up in the country until she comes to her senses, and that they leave town on Friday. That Campbell has suddenly gone abroad, without leaving any address, etc., etc. Combining all these rumours with certain confidences of yours, I have come to the conclusion that you are in an uncommonly tight place.”

“For Heaven’s sake don’t torture me with your infernal chaff,” exclaimed Kennard, throwing himself with considerable violence into a chair. “Can you help me—advise me?”

“Calm yourself, my dear fellow,” said Virrel with cool deliberation, “and we will discuss the matter. I have a plan to propose.”

* * * * *

It was past midnight when the two men separated.

“On Friday, then, at noon,” were Virrel’s last words,

as he grasped Kennard's hand in parting. "I will arrange it all."

It was noon on the following Friday. In Virrel's luxurious sitting-room the glare of the sun was shut out by thick velvet curtains. A silver lamp of curious workmanship burned on the table, shedding a dim uncertain light which scarcely defined the features of three people who stood near it—Virrel, Kennard, and Gladys Raynor. The latter was very pale, and seemed much agitated. As for Kennard, he looked exceedingly ill, and, indeed, he was ill. Virrel looked serious and preoccupied, as usual.

"It is too much for you," said Kennard, addressing Gladys in low, unsteady tones. "You are trembling and nervous. We will put it off until another time, until—"

"No, no," she interrupted him feverishly. "There will be no other time. I do not know when we may meet again. Oh, quick—quick! We leave at two, and my father will be waiting for me."

"Are you ready?" said Virrel suddenly, from the other end of the room.

Gladys seated herself in a low chair, and Kennard bent over her.

"Darling, you understand?" he said. "Abandon your whole will to mine. You know how—how much is at stake."

"Yes," steadily, "I know—I understand."

He paused, then said with an effort:

"Gladys—look at me!"

She obeyed. But Kennard was so agitated and

unnerved that his usually strong will failed him. After some time he gave up the attempt in despair.

"I cannot," he said harshly. "I am idiotically nervous and unstrung."

With an impatient exclamation Virrel put him aside, and took the girl's hands in his. But after a minute or two he dropped them, saying abruptly:

"I have no power over her. I tried once before. As I told you, hers is one of those rare temperaments which only respond to the influence of one operator. Give me your hand, Kennard, and for Heaven's sake keep cool. Wait—drink this," pouring out a glass of clear and sparkling liquid from an antique flagon on a side table.

Five minutes elapsed. Then Kennard withdrew his hand from Virrel's, saying quietly:

"I am all right now. I am ready."

Gladys raised her beautiful eyes to his. The old dreamy spell came over her. In a few moments she was in a deep trance.

"Gladys," he said in a low, intense voice, "take hold of this," holding out to her a piece of crumpled note paper, covered with sprawling, uneducated handwriting, "and follow the life of—of Marion Kennard."

Her fingers closed over it mechanically. There was a brief silence; then a slight shiver passed over her.

"Yes, Harcourt," she murmured. "I know what you would have me do. I will."

She answered clearly all the questions Kennard put to her, Virrel meanwhile noting down her answers on a sheet of paper. But sometimes she paused for almost a minute before answering. Once she remained silent so long that Kennard felt his self-control rapidly forsaking him. Then she said in a hushed voice:

"I see her now—again. She is lying straight, and white, and still. She is in her coffin." With the last words she shuddered and became silent.

"Gladys," said Harcourt in a voice which it required all his self-command to keep steady, "look again, and tell me what you see."

"I see," she answered dreamily, "a crowd of people in the room. Their faces are hard and repellent; and their speech—I can only with difficulty understand it, and yet it is not a foreign tongue. I see bare, roughly-made furniture. There are no flowers in the window no pictures on the walls. On the mantelpiece I see a curiously-constructed clock. It is an almanac as well as a clock, and—"

Kennard recoiled slightly, and uttered a low, rapid exclamation.

"What is the date?" he said agitatedly.

"It points to the 2nd of October," she answered almost immediately; "and the year is 188—."

"Ah, so! A year ago," involuntarily exclaimed Virrel, who now spoke for the first time.

"Look from the window, and tell me what you see," said Kennard again.

"I see a sandy beach," she answered slowly, "and tossing waves, and a great dome-like rock far out on the water. I see a common covered with nets, and a harbour. I see——"

Here Kennard, with an inarticulate cry, suddenly dropped her hands. She awoke and started up, looking round her wildly. But the double strain had been too much for Kennard, and he had only time to get to a chair, when, for the first time in his life, he fainted.

It was some time before he came to himself again, and when he did, Gladys bent over him eagerly and excitedly.

"Harcourt," she whispered, "have I helped you? Have I done as you wished?"

"Yes," he answered faintly. "I have the clue. It is not much; but it is enough."

"Ah—I must go," she said suddenly, glancing at the timepiece.

"One moment," said Kennard, struggling to his feet. "What a weak fool you must think me—but I am all right now. I shall see **you to-night, Virrel,**" he continued hurriedly.

"My dear fellow," said the other in a determined aside, "I will put Miss Raynor into a hansom, and you will remain quietly here until I return. "There," as Kennard staggered slightly; "you're not fit to walk at present. I knew it. Sit down, and I will talk to you when I come back."

"No, no—you must not come," exclaimed Gladys in quick nervous tones. "You are ill. Oh—how white you are!" She held out her hands to him as she spoke; and Virrel considerably walked into the inner room.

"Good-bye, then," Kennard said hoarsely. "Forgive my stupid weakness, but I have been ill and out of sorts for some days. Gladys—we may never meet again. For your sake I wish we had never met. But you have given me new hope; some indefinable intuition tells me that—that I am free. I shall leave no stone unturned—no clue unfollowed. God bless you, my darling. I shall write to you if—if I am successful. If not—it is good-bye indeed—until—hereafter!"

He did not kiss her, not even the little hands that lay trembling in his. Their eyes met in silence.

Then Virrel entered the room again, and in another moment Kennard was alone.

Six weeks had passed ; and Gladys—motherless since her childhood—was now left fatherless as well. On the day following her father's funeral she returned, stunned and grief-stricken, to London. A telegram awaited her. It was dated from a fishing village in Scotland, and was from George Virrel. Its words were these :

"Kennard is very ill. Come if possible."

On a wet, stormy evening, twenty-four hours later, Gladys stepped out on the platform of the quiet little station at Girvan. Mr. Virrel met her.

"What news?" she gasped, seizing his arm.

"He is better—he is conscious," answered Virrel. "I will tell you all as we go along."

"But—his wife?" she said, trying to speak calmly.

"She died a year ago!" was the answer.

"Ah—thank God!" she said in all reverence.

Well—I don't know that there is much more to tell. Kennard, ill as he was, had gone straight to Girvan ; for he had recognized from Gladys' description in her trance the village which was his wretched wife's birthplace, and where he had first met her one ill-starred summer long ago. He found there the certificate of her death, which had taken place in the autumn of the previous year. Her lover, it appeared, had drawn her allowance until his own death some months ago. Having completed all the links in the chain of evidence which gave him back his freedom, Kennard's strength suddenly gave way, and the fever against which he had been fighting for weeks

brought him almost to death's door. Virrel came down to look after him, and as we have seen, sent for Gladys.

When the sick man was strong enough to see that young lady, we will presume that he thanked her in a suitable and efficient way for the share she had had in lifting the shadow which might have clouded his life for ever. At all events he had a very good time during his convalescence, and Virrel kindly effaced himself a good deal. Whether Kennard and Gladys *had* belonged to each other in a previous existence—a fact of which they, with Virrel, were firmly persuaded—I cannot tell; but they mutually agreed to belong to each other in this world, and a month afterwards they were married. There was one curious circumstance, by the way, connected with Kennard's illness. It was this. On his recovery he found that his mesmeric power was entirely gone. This was a matter of never-ceasing regret to Virrel. But Gladys said she thought it was just as well.



OUR EXPECTATIONS.



OUR EXPECTATIONS.

‘HOW very unfortunate!’
“How confoundedly annoying!”

The above remarks were made by my wife and myself respectively, one bright September morning as we sat at breakfast in the dining-room of our tiny old-fashioned cottage at Lowthorpe. Before us each lay an open letter; and it was the contents of these letters—individually and collectively—which had called forth the remarks set down above.

To be more explicit. Ella’s letter was from her uncle, Gregory Carper, signifying his intention of paying us a visit on the following Tuesday. My letter was from *my* uncle, Simon Finicker, saying *he* intended paying us a visit on the following Tuesday.

Nothing particularly alarming in that, you think?

Wait a little. Old Gregory Carper was a most eccentric and irascible individual of reputed fabulous wealth, who had more than once distinctly stated that it was his intention to make his only niece (my wife) his heiress. Old Finicker, my mother’s brother, was also rich in this

world's goods, and it was generally understood that I, Charles Danvers, was to be his heir. And between these two old men there was a deadly feud. The quarrel had taken place six months ago; and each uncle (after giving us an exhaustive catalogue of the enemy's enormities) had sworn in turn that if we, Ella and Charles Danvers, exchanged words, letters, or visits with the said enemy in future, we should be ostracised by the remaining uncle for ever.

Now, for more reasons than one, Ella and I looked upon this as a serious contingency; and I regret to say we had recourse to duplicity. We gave each uncle to understand that we held the other as the scum of the earth (if we didn't exactly say so, we implied it); and, so far, we had kept on tolerably friendly terms with both. We called our baby—we had a baby—Gregory and Simon by turns. He had been christened Gregory Simon in the presence of both uncles, just a week before the fatal quarrel took place. (Poor little soul! I used to shudder when I thought of his *début* with such a name at the public school where his mother already talked of sending him.)

I offer no excuse for our unpardonable conduct. I acknowledge that I played the part of a mean, abject sneak. But I trust the reader will see that under existing circumstances the projected simultaneous visits of these two uncles was, to say the least of it, awkward.

However, there was no help for it. To write and put either off would offend the put-off one almost as mortally as to allow the dreaded meeting to take place.

"There will be a fine scene!" I observed grimly, after a short silence. "By Jove!—there will!"

Ella stirred her coffee abstractedly ; and I stuck my egg-spoon vindictively through the shell of my third egg, with a vague wish that I were inflicting corporeal injury on either objectionable relative.

"Charlie!" said my wife, in piteous tones, when some few minutes had elapsed, "what *shall* we do?"

"Ask me something easier, my dear," I replied gloomily.

"It is so awkward in every way," she went on. "Jane does not return from her holiday until Wednesday." (Jane was our house-maid.) "And cook's being so deaf makes her so stupid. And your uncle is so fidgety and particular," she added.

I did not reply, but re-read both letters silently. No, there was no mistake, both uncles were coming on Tuesday. Mr. Carper proposed a three days' visit; Mr. Finicker intended starting early on Wednesday morning to attend a cattle-show some twenty miles from Lowthorpe. He would come down, he (my uncle) said, by the 5.15 from Waterloo.

"As usual, Mr. Carper does not mention the train *he* intends coming down by," I observed drily. "There only remains, as a climax, that they should *both* elect to come by the 5.15."

"Oh Charlie! Surely not!"

"I think it is more than likely," I returned with the calmness of despair, as I proceeded to unfold the newspaper. I had just ten minutes to read and digest it before catching my train up to town.

"Charlie, how *can* you sit there coolly reading the paper!" exclaimed my wife, almost in tears.

"My dear," I remonstrated, "there are five days to

come before Tuesday. We don't know what may happen in that time. One of the old fools may—er—ahem! We can talk it over when I come home to-night," I concluded hastily. Then, with what I have been told is the innate selfishness of the masculine mind, I plunged into the news of the day.

When I came home at night, Ella met me with a beaming smile.

"Charlie!" she began gleefully, as I divested myself of my hat and overcoat, "I have thought of a plan!"

"A plan!" I echoed vaguely.

Reader—I give you my word I had forgotten all about those two fiendish old men.

"Oh, the uncles!" I groaned, after a moment's reflection. "Let us have dinner first, Nell, and indigestible relatives afterwards."

Ella, as all well-drilled little wives should do, obeyed her lord and master; and dinner proceeded as usual.

When I had lit my post-prandial pipe, I stretched myself upon the sofa, folded my arms behind my head, and intimated that I was ready to hear the "plan."

My wife came and seated herself upon a low stool beside me.

"You see, Charlie," she began, with round solemn eyes fixed upon mine, "I have thought and thought all day; and this seems the only thing to be done."

"Well?" I said expectantly, as she paused.

"Well," she went on, "I am confident that Uncle Simon will arrive first on Tuesday; and he shall have the pink room."

"I have no objection," I observed, as she paused again; "but I fail to see how that can help us."

"Charlie, you are so stupid, dear. You know there is something the matter with the lock of the pink room door."

I looked—as I felt—bewildered.

"Yes," I assented helplessly.

"Well, Charlie," in impatient tones, "don't you understand?"

"I confess to being still at sea, my dear," I said, with abject humility. "But go on. Unfold your plan; and my feeble intellect will try to follow. The uncle who appears first upon the scene—Uncle Simon, I think you said?—is to have the pink room; and there is something the matter with the lock of the pink room door. I think I have mastered these two important details. And *après?*"

"Don't you see?" my wife went on, with growing excitement. "The lock has often stuck fast before. It did the last time Uncle Simon was here. We could not get it open for ever so long. Don't you remember? So what more natural than that it should go wrong on Tuesday?" And she looked at me triumphantly.

"But, my child," I murmured, "it won't 'go wrong,' as you call it, on Tuesday. Things never do go wrong when they ought to. It's only when they didn't ought to," I concluded vulgarly.

"Of course, you silly boy, I know that. But then, you see, I'll *make it go wrong!*"

"Make it go wrong!" I repeated. "What do you mean?"

Ella regarded me witheringly; then said:

"Really, Charlie, you seem as if you were being stupid on purpose. Why, of course, when Uncle Simon goes

up to get ready for dinner, I shall simply *lock the door*. Then we can pretend that the lock has stuck fast again, and that we can't get the door open. When Uncle Gregory is gone to bed—you know he always goes quite early—we can let poor old Uncle Simon out, and give him a splendid supper to make up for the loss of his dinner. He is very good-natured, you know. And then," she concluded, "he will be away in the morning before Uncle Gregory is up. So there you are!"

I gave vent to a low, prolonged whistle.

"You are a most Machiavelian young woman, Nell!" I said gravely. "What a diplomatist you would have made!"

"Yes," modestly; "I think it is rather a nice little plan. It came into my head this afternoon, while I was putting baby to sleep."

"There are two rather serious objections, however," I observed, after puffing at my pipe for some seconds in silence.

"Well?" rather sharply.

"Well—it seems an uncommonly *sneaky* kind of thing, doesn't it? Even for *us*!" with a grim smile.

"Oh no," promptly. "Not when you get used to the idea. *I* thought so myself at first; but it soon wore off."

"Ah!" I murmured, lost in admiration of this remarkable and easy code of morals.

"You said two objections, Charlie," resumed my wife. "What was the other?"

"How are you so sure that my uncle will arrive first?" I inquired. "If it should chance to be *yours*, I wouldn't give much for the success of your plan. Mr. Carper is a

very respectable old gentleman—but I think you could hardly call him *sweet-tempered*! He——”

“Now, don’t make objections, dear,” interrupted Ella decisively. “I know your uncle will come first, because he always comes early in the afternoon; and Uncle Gregory never comes until the last train he can possibly get before dinner-time.”

“Besides,” I said weakly, “there will be no opportunity for the lock to stick fast, I imagine. I don’t think my uncle locks his bedroom door. Men don’t generally. I never do.”

“Oh, it doesn’t want to be locked, you silly boy! If I left the key inside, how could I fasten it outside? Really, Charlie, you are much less intelligent than I thought you were.”

I bore this accusation meekly and in silence. I was thinking what a fearful row there would be if the imprisoned uncle got out before the appointed time, and found us entertaining the enemy at dinner. Then a sudden feeling of compunction took possession of me.

“No, by Jove!” I exclaimed, rising from the sofa, and taking up a position on the hearthrug, “I won’t consent to any such plan. It’s certain to miss fire somehow; and then we’ll be in a nice scrape. Let the two old fellows come, and have done with it. If they disinherit us both, and ignore our son’s future, it can’t be helped. I’m heartily sick of all this pretence and underhand nonsense, and I won’t have any more of it.”

But Ella, after a dismayed pause, wept and entreated so, and, in short, cajoled me in the way women *do* cajole us when they like, to such purpose that I at last gave in, and consented. Whereupon hypocritical letters were

written to both uncles, expressive of our pleasure at their projected visit, etc. ; and I permitted myself the luxury of being in an exceedingly bad temper for the next few days.

The fateful Tuesday arrived in due course, and by Ella's special request I came home by a much earlier train than usual. The afternoon had passed without bringing Uncle Simon. Our evil star was evidently in the ascendant ; for at half-past five a fly from the station drove up to the door, and from it stepped—Uncle Gregory !

I looked at Ella witheringly.

"Never mind, dear," she said, in hurried tones. "It can't be helped. I'll manage. Just leave everything to me !"

I muttered a few maledictory remarks under my breath, and went to the door with wreathed smiles to greet our relative. I saw at once, by certain infallible signs, that he was in one of his most aggressively unpleasant moods. He swore at the fly-man ; contradicted me flatly and rudely when I mentioned the usual fare ; and snubbed poor Ella so viciously on the subject of a new velvet dress she wore, that I saw the tears spring to her eyes with mortification, and I myself crimsoned with rage. However, we pressed him to take some refreshment—sherry, I think it was—and after two large glasses of the same he became somewhat mollified.

At this point a telegram was handed in. It was from my uncle, saying we might expect him by the 5.50.

"Wouldn't you like to get ready for dinner now, uncle?" Ella said after some time, with a nervous glance at the timepiece (I had shown her the telegram).

It was a quarter to six, and Uncle Simon's train was due in five minutes.

"Plenty of time. Plenty of time," said the old gentleman, helping himself to another glass of sherry. "You don't dine till six, do you?"

I saw that Ella was quite pale.

"Pray don't hurry," I observed calmly. As I spoke the whistle of Uncle Simon's train was heard in the distance. Ella disappeared from the room, and in another moment the dinner-bell sounded vigorously.

Old Carper rose—after imbibing a final glass of sherry.

"I hope you have something decent for dinner," he growled. "I'm as hungry as a hunter. Hadn't time for more than a bite at lunch."

I smiled a painful smile, and murmured something to the effect that I hoped he would have something he could enjoy.

The old fellow plodded heavily upstairs, where Ella was waiting to usher him into the fateful pink room. In another moment my wife, flushed and breathless, joined me at the foot of the stairs.

"Have you done it?" I asked gloomily, feeling as I imagine Macbeth must have done.

"Yes," she answered, showing me the key, preparatory to slipping it into her pocket. "And, Charlie, I took down the bell-rope to-day; so all is safe. But, oh dear! how very unfortunate that Uncle Simon didn't come first. I suppose he will be here directly."

Just then the door-bell rang loudly. It was Uncle Simon.

It chanced that Mr. Finicker was not in the most amiable frame of mind either. He had lost his umbrella,

it appeared ; and was even more aggravatingly nervous and fidgety than usual.

Just as dinner was served, a loud banging was heard from the room above. (I don't think I have mentioned that the pink room was situated just above the dining-room.) I hastened upstairs, and hypocritically turned the handle of the pink room door, having previously knocked.

"Are you not coming down to dinner, Mr. Carper?" I inquired, feeling, I confess, rather ashamed of myself.

"Coming down!" thundered my wife's uncle indignantly, from within. "Of course I'm coming down ; but I can't get the door open !"

"No?" I returned, with a careful accent of surprise. "I trust this confounded lock has not caught again. We intended having it repaired, but the locksmith has unfortunately not arrived." (Which, as he had not been sent for, was not to be wondered at.)

"Shake the handle from the inside," I continued.

He shook the handle ; but—I need hardly say—without effect. I shook it also.

"Perhaps you have locked it?" I suggested, allowing a faint amount of anxiety to appear in my tone.

"Locked it? Rubbish!" was the irate reply. "What should I lock it for? I'm not a woman. Besides, there's no key."

"I am exceedingly annoyed," I went on, in a voice full of vexed solicitude ; "but I fear we can do nothing until the locksmith comes. It is most unfortunate ! He shall be sent for again, at once ; but of course it will take some little time, as we are so far from the village."

Whereupon followed fearful and ungovernable lan-

guage from Mr. Carper. He shook the door violently, stamped about the room, and "went on" generally in a most alarming way. I pacified him as well as I could, or rather, I tried to pacify him; but he continued to storm and swear without apparently listening to my lies—they were nothing less—and at last I went downstairs again, and took my place at the head of the table in a furious passion. Our previous deceptions had never gone so far as this; and I felt myself a sneak from the tips of my fingers to the toes of my boots. This was a most preposterous and outrageous plan of Ella's, I reflected savagely. We could never carry it out. Why had I listened to her?

As we devoured our soup we could hear footsteps tramping about excitedly and irregularly overhead. Then there was a sudden silence. It was the lull before the storm.

Scarcely had the fish been removed than a series of loud bangs resounded on the panels upstairs. Uncle Simon started nervously. Ella became crimson, and murmured something about "rousing baby." I took no notice, but went on grimly carving the fowl before me.

"Will you take a leg or a wing, uncle?" I said shortly.

"A *leg*, boy?" indignantly. "What are you thinking of? I'll take a wing—the liver wing—of course!"

I hastily apologised, and said I was thinking of something else. (So I was—I was thinking of Uncle Gregory.)

Bang! bang! bang! from above.

"Good gracious! what is that?" exclaimed Uncle Simon, in a tone expressive of alarm and amazement.

"What is what?" I asked coldly, without raising my eyes from my plate.

"That most extraordinary noise, Charles!" went on my uncle, in much agitation. "Is it possible you do not hear it?"

"I hear the wind rising," I replied calmly. "I fear we shall have a storm." (Happily, the wind *had* risen by this time, and was blowing pretty stiffly.) "Pray help yourself to claret, uncle," I continued; "I think you will find it good."

There was a short silence after this, broken by the wails of the baby, who had roused up at last. Ella fled upstairs, and I engaged my uncle in polite and easy conversation.

Suddenly, just as Mr. Finicker was launched on a lengthy tirade upon the agrarian outrages in Ireland, the banging began again with renewed fury.

What on earth could the old fellow be doing, I wondered wretchedly, as the unmistakable crash of broken glass or crockery (or both) sounded overhead. There was no saying what he might do; for Mr. Carper, when roused, was nothing less than a madman, and he was evidently roused now.

"Good Heavens! boy, what *is* that noise?" exclaimed my uncle, starting from his chair.

"What noise, uncle?" I said, with a ghastly smile. "You are nervous to-night, I fear."

"Nervous! Listen to *that*, and *that*, and *that*!" he continued fiercely. "Have you a lunatic, or a wild beast, concealed in your house, sir?"

I listened hypocritically for a few moments.

"I certainly do hear sounds," I said then, in doubtful tones. (By this time the noise was enough to waken the dead.)

"Sounds! Why, you must be deaf, or an idiot, sir. It's Pandemonium, I tell you—nothing less."

"My dear uncle," I replied gently, "compose yourself. Those—er—sounds are, I regret to say, of frequent occurrence. When the wind is high, as it is to-night, the noise is positively deafening." (It certainly was.) "I will go up after dinner and fasten the skylights in the attics. They have been left open, probably. The house is said to be haunted; but that is all nonsense, of course."

"Haunted!" repeated my uncle, glancing over his shoulder nervously. "Haunted! That is very unpleasant! I—I never knew that."

"No?" I returned in careless tones. "We certainly hear some most unaccountable noises. But one gets accustomed to them in time. Do have some more claret."

Though I spoke thus calmly, I was inwardly consumed with rage and mortification and shame. However, there was no help for it. I must keep it up now at all events; and by-and-by that maniac upstairs would surely, in the course of nature, tire himself out. I simply could not go and tell him any more lies. Things must take their course, I resolved desperately.

"You were speaking of the Irish question," I observed, in courteous tones (making myself heard as well as I could amid the appalling row overhead). "I quite agree with you that something will have to be done." ('By Jove!' I ejaculated mentally, 'something *will* have to be done, or my wife's uncle will be through the ceiling on to the dining-table'!)

Uncle Simon helped himself to claret, and glanced upwards.

"It—it seems to be in the room above," he said, in a helpless, irritated kind of way.

"Oh, it is sometimes in one part of the house, sometimes in another," I answered carelessly. "The curious thing is that I have known weeks to pass without our hearing any peculiar noises at all. You were not disturbed during your last visit, if I remember rightly. But, pardon me, you were speaking of Mr. Gladstone's policy in regard to Ireland, were you not?"

"Ah, yes, yes! It is atrocious! The man is becoming unbearable!" resumed my uncle testily (alluding, of course, to Mr. Gladstone, and not to the concealed enemy upstairs). "It is—but bless my soul, boy, will that noise go on all night?"

Here a terrific crash, followed by a piercing yell, so startled poor Uncle Simon that he sprang to his feet, overturned his chair, and spilled his wine all over the table-cloth.

"We will go into the other room," I said, seeing that the poor old fellow was as white as a sheet. "We shall not be so disturbed there."

We accordingly went into the drawing-room, where we found Ella playing merry jigs and reels upon the piano. The noise upstairs had abruptly ceased.

After a game or two at cribbage, in which I cut but a sorry figure, I suggested, backed up by Ella, that my uncle looked very tired; and alluded to his projected early start in the morning. He agreed that he *was* tired; and after a couple of stiff glasses of brandy and water he went to bed.

An ominous silence, meanwhile, prevailed in the pink room.

When we were alone, I turned to Ella, and said in a voice of suppressed fury—

“Well, madam, may I ask what you propose doing now? I swear this is the last time I shall have anything to do with such confounded tomfoolery. I never felt so contemptible in my life! Your uncle and mine may leave their money to the Irish Land League, or to the devil, for all I care,” I continued, pacing up and down the room in a towering passion. “I refuse to take part any longer in your mean, deceitful practices.”

This was distinctly unjust, of course, as well as rude; and Ella fired up at once, saying that it was as much my fault as hers, etc.

“Hold your tongue, madam!” I thundered, goaded past endurance.

Here there was an extraordinary, inexplicable, muffled kind of noise from the direction of the pink room. I seized a candle, and we rushed upstairs.

“I hope and trust he may not have a fit of apoplexy,” I muttered between my set teeth, as we reached the door.

All was silent.

“Where is the key?” I said shortly.

But Ella hesitated.

“Uncle,” she said timidly, through the keyhole, “we have found an old key that we think will open the door. The locksmith did not come.”

I listened, appalled, to this glib perversion of the truth, and wondered if it had ever been practised upon me. Still, all was silent.

“The room is quite dark, Charlie,” said my wife nervously, as she proceeded to fit the key into the lock.

In another moment the door was open, and a gust of wind almost extinguished my candle. I held it aloft with a whistle of dismay; for what a scene met our eyes! The room was strewn with maimed and disfigured furniture; the mirror was cracked right across; the crockery was smashed; and the lower half of the window appeared to have entirely vanished. And oh, horror! the pale pink window-curtains, the bed-curtains, the covers of the chairs, were stained here and there with deep crimson. But where was Uncle Gregory?

He had disappeared. The room was empty!

Ella, after a horrified glance around, uttered a series of piercing screams.

"Hush!" I exclaimed, seizing her arm viciously. "Have you lost your senses? You will wake Uncle Simon."

But she sobbed and cried, and declared hysterically that Uncle Gregory was dead, and that it was all my fault. I indignantly pointed out the glaring injustice of this remark; and stated my conviction that the old gentleman, in desperation, had probably taken a "long drop" from the window. "I hope you are pleased with the result of your *plan*, Mrs. Danvers," I went on, with cutting sarcasm. "It has certainly been a most brilliant success—so far. Of all the——"

I was interrupted by the sound of a door opening along the passage, and the next moment Uncle Simon, in an exceedingly airy costume, and carrying a candle in a dangerously horizontal position, appeared before our astonished gaze. (I had always suspected that my uncle wore a wig. Now I had ocular demonstration. His head was as bald as an egg.)

"Bless my soul!" he gasped, with chattering teeth, letting the candle run down on our new Kidderminster, "this is a most ghastly house! I refuse to go to bed again, Charles," he continued excitedly. "I shall sit up all night. My nerves are quite unstrung."

Here there was a terrific and continuous peal at the front-door bell. It rang, and rang, and rang. I went down to open it—our domestic having gone to bed—and Ella followed me. Hardly had I drawn back the bolt than Mr. Carper burst in, dishevelled, panting, purple with rage; his clothes stained with earth, his hands cut and bleeding. He tore past us upstairs like a madman, and on the landing he cannoned violently against Uncle Simon, who was clinging to the stair railings shivering and shaking in his very sketchy attire. To our utter amazement the two old men grasped hands warmly, and all but embraced each other.

"Where on earth did you come from, Carper?" quavered my uncle, almost in tears.

"Finicker!" returned the other in a choking voice, "I'm glad to see you—very glad to see you. Let us leave this infernal place, *now*—at once." Then turning to me, "I tell you, Charles Danvers, you will regret the despicable part you have played to-day only once, and that, sir, will be all your life. You are a low, contemptible hound, sir. But I see now through your plot to secure both my money and my friend Mr. Finicker's. Yes, my *friend*, I say. You might have saved yourself your lies, sir; and you too, madam," fiercely, to the pale and trembling Ella. "Mr. Finicker and I were foolish enough to quarrel, it is true; but I rejoice to say that we were reconciled a week ago. Ah, you may cry, madam,

and you may swear under your breath, sir, but you are an infernal young liar, Charles Danvers, and your wife is not a whit better. I renounce you both for ever!"

"And so do I," chattered Uncle Simon. "We will leave this house to-night, late as it is. We can get rooms, without doubt, at the Lowthorpe inn."

So saying he retired—with as much dignity as his costume would permit—to his room, accompanied by the dilapidated-looking Mr. Carper. Ella went on crying. I simply swore, "not loud, but deep."

Within ten minutes the two old gentlemen reappeared, equipped for departure. Protestations, explanations, apologies, were all in vain. Our outraged relatives left the house without deigning to take any further notice of either Ella or myself; and as they disappeared into the darkness, I felt as if every atom of my self-respect went with them.

I draw a veil over the harrowing scene which followed.

My wife and I did not speak to each other for at least a week after this deplorable evening—but that is a mere detail.

The failure of Ella's "plan," however, marked an epoch in my life. It was my last deception. Since then I have been doggedly, uncompromisingly truthful and straightforward in all my words and actions; and I have observed a similar metamorphosis in Ella. If ever—in the future—I find out Gregory Simon in a lie, I shall flog him most unmercifully. We have neither seen nor held any communication with either uncle since that unlucky night. I fear our chances of heirship are gone for ever.

Sic transit gloria mundi?

BETWEEN FOUR WALLS.



BETWEEN FOUR WALLS.



IT was snowing steadily—a small, fine, deliberate snow, which was swiftly filling up every little crack and crevice where a snow crystal could possibly lodge, and evidently meant business. For the matter of that, it had been snowing off and on for the last three days; but these intermittent showers had now settled down into a blinding snowstorm. There was nothing to be seen but snow, floating, whirling, dancing, in mad fiendish fantastic glee, as though it never meant to leave off. It was a dreary prospect. So, at least, thought a young girl who was toiling through the wintry dusk—a tiny, elf-like creature with a small pale face, and brown curly hair blown about a pair of pathetic dark eyes, which looked as if they might not be very far from tears. For she was not only worn out and wet through, poor little soul, but she had lost her way. To be lost on Dartmoor in a snowstorm is no joke, I can tell you; and to make matters worse—if they could be made worse—it was now quite dark, and the wind was rising steadily. All at once the girl slipped—fell forward—a glimmer of light flashed before her eyes—and with a long, sobbing cry, she sank down, down, into a treacherous snowdrift.

Not a hundred yards away two men were luxuriously enjoying their post-prandial pipes in a small heavily-raftered room, which looked like nothing except what it was, namely, the principal apartment in a tiny shooting-box, intended to all appearance solely and entirely for the use of the sterner sex. A roaring fire blazed in the yawning grate, almost putting to shame the light of the lamp which stood on a small table near the hearth, in company with some dried fruits and a bottle of Burgundy.

"By Jove! how cold it is!" said the elder of the two men, as he threw another piece of coal on the fire.

"Cold? it's the very deuce," shivered his companion. "Wonder if it still snows," he went on, rising and sauntering towards the yet unshuttered window as he spoke.

He was a tall, fair, good-looking fellow, of perhaps thirty, with dark blue, rather passionate eyes, and sunny hair.

"Worse than ever!" he muttered. "I say, Lance, this looks cheerful. Old Wellings will be snowed-up on the road if he doesn't mind," he added. "He ought to be back by this time."

"Horrible contingency," murmured the individual addressed as Lance, with a lazy smile, as he filled his pipe anew. "If he doesn't get back, we are in for the pleasing exercise of cooking our own dinners, making our own beds, and 'doing for ourselves' generally for an indefinite time. For I venture to predict that we too are safe to be snowed-up before the morning." He leaned back in his chair as he spoke, and closed his grey eyes sleepily, as though the prospect didn't disturb him very much.

He was not a handsome fellow, Lancelot Darrell, but he had a kind, strong, refined face, which somehow invariably impelled those about him to trust him implicitly. This was mainly due, I think, to a certain indefinable something about either his eyes or his mouth, I am not sure which—or perhaps both.

All at once he sat up, and said hastily,

"I say, Carruthers, did you hear a noise outside?—a little cry like a child's or a woman's?"

"No, can't say I did," returned the other. Then after listening for a moment or two, he added, "I hear the wind, but nothing else."

Darrell rose, and came over to the window. As he stood, it was noticeable that he was scarcely so tall as his companion; he was better built, though, and his general physique was more powerful. He threw up the sash, and vainly tried to pierce the gathering darkness beyond. All was silent outside, save for the fitful moan of the fast-rising wind, and the soft intermittent sweep of the snow against the window-panes. Suddenly, almost close at hand, it seemed, there came a faint, uncertain little cry. Both men started, and Darrell went out into the tiny square hall, and opened the outer door.

"Is anyone there?" he called out in his clear, pleasant voice.

"Oh, come quick, please," was the answer, in sobbing childish tones.

"A child, by Jove!" he muttered, plunging out into the snowy darkness.

A moment or two later he shouted,

"Show a light here, Gilbert, will you?"

Carruthers did as he was desired, and stood in the doorway, holding the lamp aloft in amazement.

"What the devil is it?" he exclaimed, as Darrell, carrying a drenched dark bundle in his arms, hurried past him into the house.

"*What* is it?" Carruthers repeated, following the other into the sitting-room, and setting down the lamp in a bewildered kind of way.

"Get the brandy, there's a good fellow," was the only reply, as Darrell placed the bundle gently on the sofa, and knelt down beside it.

"*By Jove!*" ejaculated Gilbert under his breath, as he got out the brandy, "here's a rum go, and no mistake!" For he had caught a brief glimpse of a pale, sweet little face, and long tangled hair. Was it a child?—or a woman?

After some time—it seemed an abnormally long time to both men—the eyes opened, and their owner sat up, pushing back her hair nervously, and gazing in startled amazement at the two concerned masculine faces before her.

"How—how did I get here?" she faltered. "I remember nothing but snow and darkness, and that I felt myself falling—falling—then I heard a voice—I tried to call out—" She stopped, and put her little hands confusedly to her head. Then she added, turning her great dark eyes upon Darrell, "Did you—find me?"

"Yes," he answered, with a kind little smile. "You must have slipped down the bank at the end of the house. We heard you cry out, and I found you."

He unfastened and removed her cloak and hat as he spoke, and hung them to the fire, while Gilbert wheeled forward a large easy-chair, and stirred the coals into a fiercer blaze.

"Do you feel better now?" said the latter.

"I feel very cold," she answered in a weak little voice, and she shivered. "My clothes are so wet, you know," she added, looking up at him pathetically.

"By Jove, yes, of course, so they are!" he said in some perplexity. "You must have them dried in some way."

"Had I not better try to get home?" she went on helplessly. "I live near Tavistock. Am I far from there?"

"We are seven miles from Tavistock," said Darrell, who was pulling at his moustache in an absent way he had when disturbed or perplexed—and just now he was both.

The girl rose to her feet with a cry of dismay.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she said in a terrified voice. "My aunt will be so dreadfully anxious. Oh, I *must* get back to-night!"

"I fear it is impossible," said Carruthers gravely. "It is not only a fearful snowstorm even for Dartmoor; but with this wind the snow will drift so abominably. It is drifting now."

"Was it not a little imprudent to venture so far from home in such threatening weather?" said Darrell with a half-reproving smile.

"I did not mean to go very far," she answered. "I had gone to see a poor woman who lives on the edge of the moor; but I stayed too late, and then the snow came on worse than ever. And then I lost my way. Oh, I must have walked for miles and miles," she sighed, "for I am *so* tired."

"Poor little thing!" said Darrell, with much the same compassionate tenderness he would have used to a child—

and, indeed, the girl looked little more. "Your people will be terribly anxious about you, I'm afraid ; but it is really utterly out of the question for you to get to Tavistock to-night."

"Do you mean that I must stay here?" she said, looking up at him with eyes in which there was more than a suspicion of tears.

"I'm afraid I do," he answered kindly. "And I am equally afraid that we cannot make things as comfortable for you as we should like to do. The fact is, we are two helpless bachelors, with every prospect of being doubly helpless, for the old man who acts as our servant on the few occasions when we come down here, went to Princetown this forenoon for supplies, and has evidently found the roads impassable, as he has not returned."

"Oh, *what* will Aunt Priscilla say?" she murmured in a nervous, faltering little voice. Then after a pause, "I ought to tell you who I am, I suppose. My name is Leslie Heath. My aunt is Miss Carlyon. She has taken The Grange for three years."

"Carlyon!" said Darrell quickly. "I knew a man Carlyon in the —th Lancers. He was junior major ten years ago."

"Ah, that must have been my Uncle Jim," she said, flushing brightly. "He has been in India ever since I can remember."

"And is it possible that you are Jim Carlyon's niece?" he exclaimed, with a pleased light in his grey eyes. "Then we may almost claim acquaintance, Miss Heath, for he used to be a great chum of mine out in Simla."

The girl looked at him with a puzzled earnestness for a second or two. Then she said gravely,

"I think you must be Captain Darrell, are you not?"

"Yes," he answered, looking surprised. "My name is Darrell—Lancelot Darrell. And this is my friend and *alter ego*, Gilbert Carruthers."

"I have so often heard Aunt Priscilla speak of you," she said to Darrell, when she had bestowed a sweet little smile on Carruthers. "You once saved Uncle Jim's life, did you not?" she added, with an awed inflection in her voice.

"Oh no, hardly that," he answered hastily.

Here Carruthers, who had been feeling rather out of it, observed very sensibly, that if Miss Heath sat much longer in her wet clothes, she would most certainly catch cold.

"But what am I to do?" she said piteously.

Darrell pulled his moustache again with a perplexed air.

"You see—er—that is—well, as this is a bachelor establishment," began Carruthers not very lucidly, "you know, of course, we—er—" Then he stopped, and stirred the fire violently, being in fact, not very sure what he intended to say.

There was a moment's pause, and then Miss Heath, being divided between a sense of the ludicrousness of her situation, and the consciousness that she was feeling miserably cold and painfully embarrassed, suddenly, and to the utter consternation of her companions, burst into a storm of hysterical sobs. She looked so small, so childish, so forlorn, and yet so lovable as she sat there in her dripping garments, that the hearts of both men went out to her with a curious protecting tenderness.

"Miss Heath!" exclaimed Carruthers, after a dis-

mayed glance at Darrell. "Oh, by Jove! poor little thing!"

Darrell poured out a little brandy, diluted it well, and held it to her lips.

"Hush! hush!" he whispered soothingly. "Drink this—it will do you good."

When he had set down the glass again, he went out of the room, turning at the door to say abruptly,

"Carruthers—come here for a minute. I want you."

They turned into the little firelit kitchen, and stood for a few minutes staring at each other in silence. Then Carruthers laughed a little.

"What's to be done?" he said. "It's deuced awkward for the poor little thing—deuced awkward all round, in fact!"

"It's more than awkward," returned Darrell seriously. "The poor child will catch her death of cold. She ought to have off those wet things, and be got to bed at once. But then—" He stopped, and frowned slightly.

"Well—er—there's my dressing-gown, don't you know," hazarded Carruthers.

"For the matter of that, there's mine," was the rather curt reply. "And I'll tell you what, Gilbert—I can have a shake-down with you for to-night, and Miss Heath can have my room. "It's rather larger than yours. And we'll take some hot coals from here, and make up a roaring fire."

"All right. Just light a candle, will you?—while I look where that old idiot has put the shovel."

Meanwhile the poor little visitor was sitting disconsolately beside the sitting-room fire.

"What horrible predicament have I got myself into?"

she muttered hysterically. "I wish old Catty Linton had been at the bottom of the sea before I went to see her to-day. Oh, what shall I do? I can't stay here all night with those two men. They must wish me far enough, I'm sure, though they try not to let me see it. I *must* get home to-night; and if I don't, what *shall* I do for dry clothes?" And then for sheer weariness, and cold, and mortification, she began to sob again. Poor little woman! she was not quite eighteen, and very young at that.

Some ten minutes later the door opened, and Darrell came in alone.

"Now, Miss Heath," he said, seating himself beside her, and speaking very gently, but very firmly too, "we must have no more tears."

But she interrupted him.

"Can I not go home?" she faltered, looking up at him with tear-drowned eyes. "In some way, surely, I might manage, might I not?"

He shook his head.

"My dear child," he said, "I fear it is quite impossible. I would take you back to The Grange at once, I need hardly say, if it could be managed in any way at all. But the roads by this time are sure to be blocked. We should only have to turn back again."

"Are you—I mean, is there no one here but you and—your friend?" she asked, after a short pause, twisting her fingers in an embarrassed kind of way.

"No, no one," he answered gravely, but with the merest suspicion of a smile under his brown moustache. "But you are not afraid of us, are you? You don't take us for ogres, I hope? Because I am afraid it is quite

inevitable that you must be our guest for to-night. Now," very gently, "be a good sensible little woman, and promise to do what I tell you, for I am horribly exercised in my mind lest you should take cold. Will you promise?"

Leslie hesitated a moment, then made up her mind to the inevitable.

"Yes," she murmured, looking up trustfully into the kind strong face, and steady grey eyes.

"That's right," he said approvingly. He had risen, and was mixing some brandy and hot water in a tumbler. "Your room is quite ready, at least it will be when the fire burns up," he continued, setting down the kettle again, and speaking in a calm matter of course voice, as though her presence in the house was the most ordinary occurrence possible. "And I want you to promise me that when you go to your room you will put your feet in hot water *at once*, as hot as you can bear it—you will find everything in readiness,—and just before you get into bed drink this," touching the tumbler he held, "and go to sleep as fast as you can. And by the way, be sure to hang your wet things to the fire. You must not mind my saying all this to you," he went on, as a slow painful blush dyed the girl's fair face. "You know I am quite an old fellow, old enough to be your father—or your Uncle Jim," he added with a smile.

At that moment Carruthers entered the room.

"Miss Heath"—he said good-humouredly, "has Darrell not told you that your room is quite ready? He and I are going to take out diplomas as first-class housemaids. Come and inspect our labours."

Leslie rose, and both men accompanied her across the

narrow little hall to a half-open door, through which the bright light of a fire gleamed cheerily.

"You will find things awfully primitive, Miss Heath," said Carruthers, as she gave him her hand; "but you will excuse deficiencies, won't you?"

"Excuse them?" she said in a low voice. "I don't know how to excuse myself for giving you so much trouble. And—and I am *sure*," she added uncertainly, "that I have turned one of you out of your room." As she spoke, she knew, in a flash, as it were, that it was Darrell she had turned out of his room.

"Good-night," said the latter, with a kindly smile. "You will be good and obedient, will you not? and you won't forget this," giving her the tumbler he carried.

When the two men got back to the sitting-room again, they took possession of their respective chairs, lit their pipes, and sat perfectly silent for quite five minutes.

Carruthers spoke first.

"I say, Lance," he said seriously, "do you suppose there's the slightest chance that Wellings will come back to-night?"

"Not the faintest, I should say," was the answer. "Indeed, I am very much afraid the roads won't be navigable for some days—that we are prisoners, in fact."

"The deuce! Then what are we to do with that girl?"

"Well—if we can't get out, I suppose she can't get out either."

"Humph! It's confoundedly awkward."

"I quite agree with you. It *is* awkward."

There was a pause, then Carruthers said,

"Curious, that you should know her people."

"Yes, it was curious," replied Darrell, as he struck a match.

"She seems a nice little thing," went on the other. "Awfully young, too, and not bad-looking."

Darrell made no reply. He was lying back in his chair, watching the blue rings of smoke curl upwards to the rafter-bound ceiling.

"How do the rations stand?" he asked suddenly.

"Phew! I don't know!" exclaimed Gilbert, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and sitting up straight in his chair. "Now that I come to think of it, there can't be a superabundance, or Wellings wouldn't have trudged to Princetown in the teeth of a coming storm. Old fool! as if he couldn't have seen to things sooner," he muttered, resuming his former position.

"Well, we must inspect the supplies in the morning," said Darrell tranquilly. "By Jove! how the wind whistles!"

"Yes, and the snow is up to the ledge of the windows already;" returned the other, "at least it was steadily progressing that way when I opened the back door. Heaven knows how high it'll be before morning. It's an awful pity we didn't go last week, Lance. I knew this would come."

"In which case poor Miss Heath would most certainly have been frozen to death," Darrell answered quietly.

Carruthers looked serious.

"Ah yes, I forgot that," he said. "Poor little girl! yes, of course."

Meanwhile, Leslie Heath, in the seclusion of her room, (or rather, to speak more correctly, Captain Darrell's room) was inspecting her quarters with some curiosity.

It was a good-sized room, quite as large as the sitting-room, uncarpeted, and of severe, almost military simplicity in its appointments. It looked very cosy, however, in the light of the roaring heaped-up fire which blazed in the wide grate, and shone brightly on the bare walls, and on the bars of the narrow brass bedstead. A gun-case and a battered portmanteau, almost covered with half-effaced labels, occupied one corner of the room, and a couple of tweed coats, smelling strongly of tobacco, hung behind the door.

Tired and cold though she was, a wild desire to scream with laughter took possession of the girl, as she noted the arrangements made for her comfort. A large bath was placed immediately in front of the fire, and beside it stood a can of steaming hot water. A pile of clean towels lay on a chair.

"Six—no, seven," murmured Leslie, counting them in much amusement.

On the bed was conspicuously displayed a masculine dressing-gown, warm and grey and soft. As this last met her view, Leslie abandoned herself to the agonies of noiseless laughter.

"Poor fellows!" she said half-aloud, "how good of them, and yet—how *funny*!" Here she choked again. "Oh, what *would* Aunt Priscilla say! How nice they are—especially Captain Darrell. And how very strange that I should make his acquaintance in such an outrageous way. Old enough to be my father, he said. Well—he does not look it. I wonder how much brandy he put in this," regarding with much distaste the tumbler she had just set down.

She took off her drenched little gown, and her equally

drenched boots and stockings, and having put them to dry, brushed out her hair with an ivory-backed brush, on which an inextricable silver monogram flourished, baffling all her efforts to decipher it. Then she examined a little pile of books which lay on the mantelpiece, consisting of a couple of French novels, a railway time table, and a small morocco-bound Bible. On the fly-leaf of this last was written :—

“Lancelot E. Darrell, from his loving mother.”

It *was* his room, then, the girl thought with a curious sense of satisfaction. At this point she became aware that she was feeling rather sleepy ; so she obeyed Darrell’s instructions to the letter, extinguished the candle, jumped into bed, and in two minutes was fast asleep.

When she awoke the fire was out, and the room in darkness ; so she promptly went to sleep again. From this sleep she was awakened by footsteps passing her door, and by the sound of subdued voices. She got out of bed, lit her candle, and looked at her watch. It was twenty minutes to twelve. Surely it must be more than that, she thought, in some perplexity. She felt as if she had been asleep for a long time. All at once she became conscious of a strong pervading odour of newly-made coffee, mingled with the appetising fragrance of fried bacon. Was it possible it could be nearly twelve noon ? She drew aside the window-blind, and looked out. It was pitch dark. Much puzzled, she examined the clothes she had hung to the fire. They felt quite dry. By this she knew that many hours must have elapsed. Besides, the room felt so cold that she also knew the fire must have been out for some time. Like

a flash, it occurred to her that the snow had risen above the windows; that in fact, they were literally snowed up!

She made a hurried toilette, then, candle in hand, she went out into the little hall. At the same moment a door opposite opened, and Carruthers came out.

"Good-morning, Miss Heath," he said. "Darrell and I were just holding a council of war as to whether or not we ought to let you know that in spite of the darkness, it is time you had some breakfast."

"Oh, we *are* snowed-up, then?" she said in a troubled voice.

"Very much so," was the laughing reply.

"Good-morning, Miss Heath," said Darrell, as the girl advanced into the room. "How did you sleep? I trust you are none the worse for your wetting?" he added, with a shade of anxiety in his tone.

"I slept very well," she answered slowly. "And I am not a bit the worse. Is it still snowing?"

"I am afraid so. Come and have breakfast. I am sure you must want it."

"We kept yours warm for you," said Carruthers, carefully lifting a covered dish from before the fire. "We must apologize for being rude enough not to wait for you, but we were awfully hungry—at least I was."

"Well, so am I," confessed Miss Heath, seating herself at the table, and accepting a plate of bacon from Carruthers, and a cup of coffee from Darrell. "But," she said suddenly, with a funny little smile, and uplifting of her eyebrows, "has your servant come back? And if he has not—*who* cooked the bacon, and made the coffee?"

"*We* did," replied Carruthers with pardonable pride.

"At least, I fried the bacon, and Darrell made the coffee. He says the bacon is done to death, and I say the coffee is muddy. What do you say?"

"I say they are both delicious," said the girl demurely. "I *do* wish I had seen you—as cooks, I mean," she added with a rippling little laugh.

"There is every probability that you may see us in that engaging capacity for some days to come," said Darrell rather ruefully.

"*Some days?*" she echoed, setting down her cup in dismay. "Do you mean to say I can't go home even to-day?"

Instead of answering Darrell pointed to the window—where the prospect was black indeed, being simply Egyptian darkness.

"Do you know how far you are from the Grange?" he said then, looking at her with amused, kindly eyes. "Quite five miles. Look how the snow has drifted already; and it is still snowing."

"Oh, Aunt Priscilla will be quite crazy," said poor Leslie in a despairing kind of way. "And *what* a nuisance I shall be to you both!"

"Do you think so?" said Darrell gravely, as he took her cup. "That is very unkind of you. Have some more coffee."

"Let us take Miss Heath up to the loft, and show her the promising state of the surrounding country," suggested Carruthers, when the visitor had resolutely refused any further nourishment.

"But—the table! It must be cleared," she said reprovingly.

"Oh—er—yes, of course," he replied in doubtful tones.

"Come on, Darrell."

"I shall help," said Miss Heath, who had thrown care and Aunt Priscilla to the winds, and was beginning to enjoy herself immensely. "Where is the kitchen?" she continued, seizing the coffee-pot. "You lead the way with the lamp, please, Mr. Carruthers."

The kitchen was in a state of indescribable confusion. Plates, knives, pans, etc., were thrown about impartially on chairs, table, and floor. A cheery fire was burning, however, and threw an air of rollicking joviality over the whole scene.

"Put them down anywhere," said Darrell, recklessly depositing on the nearest chair the cup and saucer and plate he carried.

"Oh no," remonstrated Leslie; "they must be washed and put away properly."

"Washed!" echoed both men helplessly.

"Of course," was the inflexible reply, as the speaker invested herself in a large white apron, which, by the way, was most becoming.

"Oh, I say, not just now, Miss Heath," entreated Carruthers pathetically. "There are lots of clean ones about somewhere, and you've no idea how awfully done up we both are. Why, lighting these fires alone—not to mention the cooking—took us a good hour. Darrell used more bad language over the sitting-room fire this morning than I've heard him give way to all the years I've known him."

They all laughed; and Leslie, with a disapproving shake of her curly head, began in a deft, delightfully business-like way, to reduce the scattered dishes, etc., to some kind of order, while the two men seated themselves on the partially-cleared table, and watched her with combined interest and amusement.

"Now we must have some hot water," announced this new autocrat of the kitchen. "We can't wash dishes in cold water, you know," she proceeded kindly to explain.

"Why not?" Carruthers ventured to inquire.

But Miss Heath did not answer. She was rummaging in a drawer for towels. She looked quite at home, and as busy and happy as possible. So her two slaves meekly got off the table, filled up the kettle, and replenished the fire.

"While it is heating I shall go up with you to the loft," Leslie said then, graciously. "Perhaps it has left off snowing."

"What a dear little house it is!" she exclaimed, as after a short inspection of the tiny dwelling—which was all on one floor, bungalow fashion—they prepared to climb the ladder leading to the loft.

"You are right," acquiesced Darrell reflectively; "it is small, and yes—it is most certainly dear. Give me your hand, Miss Heath, and mind your head on that beam."

"Dear me, daylight comes on one quite with a shock," said the girl, blinking her eyes a little. "Oh, oh," she went on in dismayed tones, as she took a bird's-eye view of the surrounding country from the small sloping skylight, through whose crevices the snow whirled in merrily. "Why, I can see nothing but snow! No road—and what a black sky, as if it might snow for weeks. Oh, I shall *never* get home. This is terrible!" she concluded despairingly, all her gay spirits deserting her.

"Never is a long day," said Darrell encouragingly. "We will hope for better things. You had better come

down now, Miss Heath. It is far too cold for you up here."

So they descended to the kitchen again, and with more zeal than discretion on the part of two of the performers, washed and dried the dishes, thereby breaking two plates, and cracking a tumbler. When this laborious occupation was over, it was discovered that the sitting-room fire had quietly gone out; and by the time it was lighted again, Carruthers suggested that they should have something to eat.

"We don't want to cook anything, you know," he said gleefully. "There's a cold pie and things in the larder."

So they had the "cold pie and things," washed down by a bottle of Burgundy, and felt much refreshed and invigorated thereby. Then Carruthers went up to the loft again to reconnoitre, and came back with the mingled tidings that it had stopped snowing, but was freezing hard.

"Then we must get the door open, and try to clear some of the snow from the windows," said Darrell; "for this prolonged lamplight is rather depressing."

After some time, and with considerable difficulty they got the door open, and set to work with a will. Meanwhile Leslie, left to her own devices, put her own room to rights, made up the fires, and explored the larder. There was plenty of bacon, another cold pie, and an apple-tart, besides a couple of fowls, and a fair supply of tinned meats. There were also two tins of condensed milk, and a jar of Liebig; half a dozen loaves, but no butter, and no vegetables whatever. Coffee there was in abundance.

Shortly after dusk, the windows were comparatively

clear ; and when the men came in, cold and hungry, half an hour or so later, they exclaimed with pleasure at the inviting aspect of the kitchen, which was in a state of rampant neatness, and illumined by a roaring fire. A dainty little figure, half-concealed in an enormous white apron, was flitting about with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, and an air of gleeful, childish importance.

"Oh, there you are," it said, as they entered. "How cold you both look! I was just coming to ask if you would mind having dinner, or supper, or whatever it is to be, here. It is so warm and cosy, and will save ever so much trouble, not to mention coals. Because, you know," she added with an adorable seriousness, "we must be careful of them."

"So we must," acquiesced Carruthers gravely. "Besides, it will be twice as jolly here. Let me light the lamp, Miss Heath."

They all helped to get the somewhat heterogeneous evening meal ready ; and when it was over, they drew round the fire in quite a cosy friendly fashion. Leslie insisted that her hosts should smoke their cigars or pipes as usual.

"Just as if I weren't here, you know," she said coaxingly.

It was wonderful how much at home she felt and looked already. She made a winsome little picture enough, as she sat curled up in a big easy-chair brought by Darrell from the other room for her benefit. She was not exactly pretty, that young man decided, as he looked at her from his dark corner at the other side of the fireplace, but there was something wonderfully lovable and attractive about the pale little face with its

fluffy brown hair, and its great dark eyes, out of which the pure fearless woman's soul looked so trustfully. A man might safely give his heart into the keeping of such a sweet little woman, he reflected further. Then he pulled himself up with a start, and frowned slightly at his own folly.

"I know one thing," said Carruthers suddenly, as he stretched himself out in his chair, and lit a fresh cigar, "there's not a single dish of any kind or description going to be washed in this house to-night."

Leslie laughed ; then she grew suddenly grave.

"Aunt Priscilla will think I am *dead*," she said, looking meditatively into the fire. "I do wish I had not ventured out yesterday. It was most unlucky."

Both men were silent ; for they could not honestly say they agreed with her. On the contrary I fear that, with an utter disregard for the feelings of poor Aunt Priscilla, they were rather glad that a capricious chance had thrown this winsome little maiden on their protection. It seemed curiously natural and familiar to see her sitting there, to see the firelight glinting on her hair, to hear her childlike laugh. It seemed incredible that they were unconscious of her very existence yesterday—only yesterday !

Next day passed much as its predecessor had done, except that the men worked hard all the morning clearing the snow from about the house, while Leslie attended to the domestic arrangements herself. In the afternoon Carruthers distinguished himself by concocting a fearful and wonderful stew for supper, which it appeared he had known and loved in India. Leslie looked on in sarcastic disapproval, and Darrell chopped up wood in the back

kitchen. Owing, however, to a somewhat liberal distribution of Cayenne pepper, and the total absence of any other seasoning, the stew was not a marked success, though its author declared it was "the finest thing he had tasted for many a long day." Whereupon Leslie and Darrell at once, and with suspicious haste, gave up all their rights to its consumption in his favour, and contented themselves with warmed-up fowl and bacon.

Three more days passed ; the frost still held, and the provisions diminished with alarming rapidity. Fortunately they had plenty of coals, for the cold was intense. The men worked steadily during the greater part of each day, not only clearing the snow from around the house, but working a path to the main road across the moor. Leslie found plenty to occupy her indoors ; but flitted in and out at intervals to inspect "the work" as she called the snow-clearing. In the evenings they were all glad enough to draw round the fire for rest and warmth. And very pleasant evenings they were. There was an ever increasing charm to both men in Leslie's innocent chatter, in her half-childlike, half-womanly ways, and in her singing. For she had offered in a *naïve* little way to sing to them, "to help to pass the time." So she sang every night. She had a sweet, touching, bird-like voice—a voice that found its way at once to the heart and stayed there.

It was, then, the fifth day of Miss Heath's sojourn in the little household, and it was Sunday. After the eight o'clock supper—Leslie would not allow it to be called dinner—they were as usual gathered round the fire. The lamp was unlit ; for oil was scanty and therefore precious. Candles, too, were few. And as Leslie said, firelight was good enough to talk by.

"Are we to have no music to-night, Miss Heath?" Darrell asked rather reproachfully, when they had sat silent for some time.

Leslie was sitting on the fender, burning her bonnie little face at the fire. At Darrell's words she looked up with sweet, serious eyes and said,

"I can't sing songs, you know, as it is Sunday. I never do. And—I suppose you wouldn't care for hymns?"

"Why should you suppose that?" he said in a curiously gentle voice.

While Carruthers said bluntly,

"We had rather you sang hymns than didn't sing at all. Please do, Miss Heath."

And Leslie clasped her little hands round her knees, and sang, with an earnest, absorbed, almost childlike unconsciousness, the old, sweet, familiar hymns which never grow really old for any of us; and as she sang, both men seemed carried back—back—through the long years, to their boyhood and childhood.

"Thank you," said Carruthers in a low tone, when at last the sweet voice ceased.

Darrell did not say anything. He was leaning back in his chair with folded arms, and rather a stern look about his mouth.

"I always sing to Aunt Priscilla on Sunday nights," said the girl dreamily after a pause. Then she added, "And I always read her a chapter from the Bible, too."

"Will you not read to us also?" said Darrell suddenly, after another short silence. There was an indescribable softening in his deep voice as it came through the firelit

dusk. His face Leslie could not see, for it was in deep shadow.

"Yes," she answered at once, "if you wish it. There is a Bible in my room. It is yours, is it not?" looking at Darrell.

"Yes," he answered, "it is mine."

"I will get it," said Carruthers rising, and going out of the room.

In less than a minute he was back again.

"No, don't light the lamp," said Leslie. "I can see quite well."

Then she opened the book and began to read, choosing a short chapter in Isaiah. The grand old words fell with a strange, solemn significance from the girlish lips, thought at least one of her listeners; and he became conscious with a sharp, sudden, pang, of the wide, terrible, desert of years, and follies, and sins, that lay between this pure, childlike, innocent little soul—and his own. Then he thought of his mother. It was **more** than twenty years since she had given him that little book—twenty years!

"*And sorrow and sighing shall flee away*," read Leslie, as she finished the chapter and closed the book.

This time it was Darrell who thanked her.

Shortly afterwards she said good-night, and went to her room.

"What a dear little thing she is," said Carruthers tenderly, as he came back to his seat again, after opening the door for her. "Don't you think so?"

"Yes," was the terse answer.

"What an iceberg you are, Darrell," went on Carruthers with some impatience. "About women, I mean."

"Ah," said the other indifferently. "Just hand me my pipe, will you—and the matches. Thanks."

There was a somewhat lengthened silence; then Gilbert said suddenly,

"Look here, old man, I'm going to tell you something that will make you think me an out and out fool."

Darrell took his pipe more firmly between his strong white teeth. He knew what was coming. But he did not say anything; and Carruthers continued,

"Now, if you had told me last Sunday that in less than a week I should be more hopelessly hard hit than ever I was in my life—I should simply have called you an ass."

"Much obliged," said the other curtly.

"I should really," went on Carruthers, absently taking up the poker, and raking out bits of glowing coal from between the bars of the grate. "The fact is, old man, I'm as deeply in love as any schoolboy."

Darrell received this announcement in perfect silence.

"Hang it all, Lance, you might show a little interest!" burst out Gilbert in an aggrieved tone.

"My dear fellow, you must remember, that, as yet, I have no peg to hang my interest on, so to speak," returned Darrell in rather a strained voice. "Am I to understand that you have—fallen in love with Miss Heath?" He got out the last words sharply and almost roughly, as if they hurt him.

Gilbert paused in the act of lighting his pipe, and nodded.

"You've hit it," he said then, as he threw away the match. "The thing is—has she—would she think anything of me?"

"Well, I suppose you hardly intend ascertaining her views on the matter in the meantime?" observed Darrell shortly.

"Do I intend being a howling cad?" was the indignant rejoinder. "Of course I shall wait till we get out of this confounded hole—if we ever do." Then after a pause, he went on almost boyishly, "I say, old fellow, do you think I'd have any chance?"

"I see no reason why you should not," was the answer in an odd voice.

Carruthers leant his elbow on his knee, and stared into the fire. Then he said,

"Upon my soul, as she sat there reading and singing to us to-night, with that babyish seriousness in her eyes—bless her!—I tell you, Darrell, I could have taken her in my arms and kissed her, the little darling!" He stirred the fire into a rousing blaze as he spoke, and smiled—a little caressing smile. Darrell altered his position slightly, but he did not speak; and the other proceeded, "I've fancied once or twice, you know, from her manner and that—that perhaps I might have a chance. Eh? What do you think?"

"How the devil should I know?" returned Darrell suddenly and savagely. "The girl has not confided in me!"

"Well, you needn't flare up like that about it," observed Carruthers, after surveying his companion in undisguised amazement for perhaps a minute. "Dash it all, we've always been chums, and I naturally thought you—But of course it's no matter," he broke off rather huffily.

Darrell laid aside his pipe (it had been out for some

time) and rose to his feet. The firelight flashed full on his face, and Carruthers exclaimed hastily,

"I say, old chap, are you ill? By Jove! you look uncommonly queer!"

"Ill—no," said the other, speaking seemingly with an effort. "I've felt rather done up all day, though, somehow. I think I'll go to bed."

Leslie noticed next morning that Darrell was unusually silent, even for him, and he was never a talkative fellow. She also noticed that his breakfast consisted of half a cup of coffee and nothing more. They breakfasted in the sitting-room that morning, for the kitchen chimney had taken to smoking violently.

"I say, Lance," said Carruthers, when the meal was over, and Leslie had flitted away to the kitchen, "are you afraid of the provisions giving out altogether, that you took no breakfast? We've still enough for a day or two. Miss Heath found two more tins of tongue this morning."

"No, it isn't that," said Darrell, who was leaning back in his chair, looking wretchedly white and ill. "But I have a most infernally sore throat, and feel so completely done up I can scarcely move. Don't worry me, there's a good fellow. And don't say anything to Miss Heath."

But Miss Heath saw for herself that Darrell was looking very ill, and that as the day advanced he looked worse. His voice too, grew hoarse and thick, and finally almost inaudible.

"You have got a shocking cold, have you not?" she said, looking down at him anxiously as he sat shivering over the fire in the winter dusk.

"Yes, I suppose I have," he answered, trying to smile. "I feel regularly flooded."

Some hours later, when Leslie had left the room to see about supper, Darrell rose suddenly.

"I say, Gilbert," he said faintly, "I can't sit up any longer. I feel awfully ill ; and I don't want any supper. Make my excuses to Miss Heath, will you ?"

"Poor old chap, you do look bad," said Carruthers in a concerned voice. "Is it your throat ?"

"Partly. Besides, I am horribly sick."

"Have some brandy," suggested the other.

"No, thanks. I can't swallow anything." And he went languidly out of the room.

So Gilbert and Leslie had a *tête-a-tête* dinner, and rather a silent one.

Darrell was very ill all night, and in the morning was quite unfit to leave his bed.

"I can't get him to take anything," said Carruthers to Leslie after breakfast. "I tried to give him a teaspoonful of brandy—he's been so sick, you know ; but I don't think he can swallow at all now. And he seems so awfully weak ; he can hardly lift his head. I can't understand his losing strength so in the time."

"I hope it is not diphtheria," said Leslie, speaking almost in a whisper, and turning very pale. "It begins just in that way. And it is such a swift, insidious thing. I had a cousin who died of it ; and she was only ill a few days."

"I don't know what it is," said Carruthers gloomily. "I don't like his looks, anyway. His throat has been bad for some days, he says ; but he thought it would pass off."

"I say, old fellow," muttered Darrell late that night,

when the other had been vainly persuading him to have a spoonful of tinned soup he had heated for him, "keep away from me as much as you can. I know what this is now. It's diphtheria, and it's horribly infectious."

"Oh no, it isn't, old man, it's just a bad cold, you know," said Carruthers hastily. But he felt more alarmed at Darrell's looks than he would have cared to own; and as a matter of fact he was beginning to feel queer enough himself, for his own throat was just sufficiently painful to render swallowing a very disagreeable necessity, and his limbs felt as tired and heavy as though he had been walking for days. "I wish there was anything I could do," he went on in a troubled voice.

The other smiled faintly.

"Leave me alone, there's a good old chap," he said wearily and indistinctly. "It's no use. I don't think I shall see another night. This sort of thing loses no time, you know."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that, Darrell," remonstrated Carruthers. "Why, we'll have you as well as ever in a couple of days," he added with a poor attempt at cheerfulness.

In the morning, however, Darrell could not speak above a whisper, and hardly that. He was not unconscious, but utterly prostrate and powerless. He shook his head when Carruthers brought him a cup of coffee, and altogether seemed so far through, that the other went back to the sitting-room with a terribly anxious look in his bonnie blue eyes, and a curious unwonted tightening at his heart. For they had been friends, indeed almost brothers, since their school-days.

Leslie looked up quickly as he entered.

"How is he?" she asked, in a voice that shook perceptibly.

"Very bad," was the brief answer.

"Is he worse, do you think?" she faltered.

"He's about as bad as he can be," he answered in a choked voice. He bit his lips nervously, and then burst out, "Oh, I say, Miss Heath, I can't help thinking it's all up with the dear old fellow. You've no idea how ill he is. He says himself he'll not last through another night. Good God! it's awful to be shut up here—to see him die before our eyes—" He stopped, and took a gulp of coffee.

While he was speaking Leslie had half risen from her chair, nervously grasping the table with both her hands.

"Do you mean—that he will—*die*?" she gasped.

Carruthers rose too, with a gesture of alarm and dismay.

"Miss Heath—Leslie— Good Heavens! how white you look! You are not going to faint, are you? Let me get you some water or something."

"No—no," she whispered. "I—I am not ill. Dying—you say! Dying! Ah, no—no. It would be too cruel. Oh, surely you can get some help!" she went on wildly and passionately. "Surely you will not let him die without making an effort, at least, to save him! Why don't you? He will die—he will die. Oh, it is cruel!"

She threw herself into a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

Carruthers grew very white.

"What do you mean?" he said hoarsely. "What is it to you—his life or death?"

She made no answer, but he could see that she was trembling violently.

"Do you mean," he said, speaking very slowly, and with long pauses between the words, "that you—care for him—that you—love him?"

She looked up then, her eyes dry and tearless, but full of a maidenly indignation at the ruthless question.

"You have no right—" she began in a breathless whisper.

"Answer me," he interrupted her harshly.

Then all at once she broke into bitter weeping.

"I don't know—I don't know," she sobbed wildly. "But if he dies—oh, if he dies, my heart will break!"

The next moment she was gone; and Carruthers was alone. He stood quite still where she had left him. The room seemed to grow suddenly dark. He groped his way to a chair and sat down. "If he dies, my heart will break!" The sweet childish tones, vibrating with a new fierce note of woman's passion, rang in his ears still. He had half-suspected for the last day or two that Darrell cared for Leslie, but never that she cared for him—never. He hid his face on his arm, feeling curiously tired and sick. He sat quite still for some time, and when he raised his head his blue eyes were a little misty, and his lips were trembling.

Now, if anyone had had leisure to think of the weather this morning, they would have noticed that the wind had changed during the night, and that it was thawing rapidly. Carruthers' attention was drawn to this fact by a stray sunbeam shining on the opposite wall; and it strengthened his already half-formed resolution.

"Poor little soul!" he muttered, as the girl's great

despairing eyes seemed again to look into his. "Well—her heart shall not break if I can help it."

He rose, crossed the hall, and entered the sick man's room. Darrell was lying quite still, seeming to breathe with painful difficulty. His eyes were closed, but he opened them as Carruthers came to the bedside. The latter bent over him, and moistened his lips with brandy. Darrell thanked him with a look. He was past speaking now. Carruthers replenished the fire, and went slowly out of the room; then he got on his boots, wrapped himself in his overcoat, and provided himself with a stout walking-stick. As he passed the door of Leslie's room, he paused, fancying he heard a sound of stifled sobbing. But as he moved away the door opened and the girl came out. Her eyes were swollen, and she was very pale; but on seeing Carruthers she flushed up suddenly. He took her hands in his, and drew her gently into the sitting-room.

"I am going to Princetown to get a doctor," he said very quietly. "It is thawing rapidly, so I daresay I shall manage very well. Shall you be afraid to be left alone—until I return?"

"No—no," she answered with a little sob. "Oh, Mr. Carruthers, forgive me for my hasty words—forget all I said—I did not—"

"My dear," he said unsteadily, "I have nothing to forgive."

She hesitated a moment, then she said, with earnest troubled eyes raised to his,

"May I—may I take care of him till you come back? He—he might die there, all alone. And," eagerly, "you need not be afraid of infection for me. I had diphtheria

once long ago. And I was with my cousin when she died, and I never took it." There was a pathetic quivering of the tender little mouth that was almost too much for Carruthers. He passed his hand wearily over his forehead.

"It is an awful risk for you," he said in a harassed kind of voice. "But—I must go—it is the only chance for the dear old fellow; and as you say, he ought not to be left alone. I hope I shall only be away a few hours at furthest; but if I should not get back before dark, will you light the little lantern and put it in the loft window? I don't know that there is much you can do for Darrell," he went on with a half break in his voice, "except give him a spoonful of brandy from time to time, if you can get him to take it. There isn't much, but I will bring some back with me. And—keep away from him as much as you can; there is no use running any needless risk." He tried to look and speak as usual, but he did not succeed very well.

Leslie looked at him anxiously.

"You are not ill too, are you?" she said.

"Oh no," he answered in a quiet voice. "Now, good-bye for a few hours. No, don't come to the door; it is too cold for you."

As he spoke, he pulled his tweed cap well over his forehead, and buttoned his coat up to his neck.

"God bless you, my darling," he murmured under his breath, as he turned away. Then he passed out into the chill air of the winter morning. He had rather the wind had been a little less keen, for his head ached, and his throat felt abominably stiff and sore. But he pulled himself together, and plunged away through the snow-

drifts, the first of which took him up to his waist, and the next nearly to his neck. However, a hundred yards or so from the house, walking became less difficult, the snow barely reaching his knees.

After a few minutes hesitation Leslie opened the door of the room where Darrell lay, and went in. It was no time to think of conventionalities, the poor child reflected feverishly. He was ill—alone—perhaps dying, and (here a rush of crimson stained her cheeks) and she loved him. She had almost loved him before she knew him—this hitherto unknown hero, who had saved uncle Jim's life—and his grave, tender, chivalrous thought and care for her had done the rest. She knew now why the past few days had seemed so strangely happy to her; and why the possibility of his illness ending fatally filled her with such a terrified, dreary sense of desolation.

He opened his eyes languidly as the door opened; and a dark flush rose to his face when he saw who his visitor was. His lips moved, but soundlessly, and he made a weak gesture as though to motion her away from him.

"Hush, you must not try to talk," she said very calmly and steadily. "I am going to take care of you until Mr. Carruthers comes back. He has gone to Princetown for a doctor. The snow is rapidly melting, and it has begun to rain, so he will not be very long away. You need not fear infection for me," she added, noting the distressed anxiety in his eyes; "I have nursed people with diphtheria before, and never taken it." Then she moistened his lips with brandy, shook up his pillow, and gently sponged his face and hands. He was too weak to gain-say her, indeed he appeared to grow momentarily weaker,

his breath came in short quick gasps, and after a time he hardly seemed to notice that she was in the room.

With a choking sob, she went back to the sitting-room. There was nothing she could do—nothing. Only wait. Almost mechanically she cleared the breakfast-table, and turned her attention to the fire, which had burned rather low. Carruthers would be cold and wet when he came back, she remembered. When he came back? Would he get back in time? *Could* he? She absently crumpled up a piece of an old newspaper, and was about to thrust it between the bars of the grate to coax the dying fire, when a few of the printed words caught her attention. Smoothing out the paper, she hastily scanned the paragraph, which ran thus:—

“The value of common flowers of sulphur in cases of malignant sore throat is becoming daily more fully recognized by the medical faculty. Even in the last stage of diphtheria, when used as a gargle, or in extreme cases—where the patient is unable to gargle—sprayed upon the throat, it has been known to eat away the false membrane which is the peculiar characteristic of this disease, and give speedy relief.” Then followed directions as to use, etc.

Leslie dropped the paper, and rose quickly to her feet. She stood quite still for a minute or two, pressing her hands to the sides of her head in confused anxious thought. *Where* had she seen a little paper packet labelled “Flowers of Sulphur?” In another moment she was in the kitchen, wildly rummaging in the drawers. After searching in vain for some time, she suddenly, and with a quick little cry, pounced upon a small crushed up paper packet at the back of one of the shelves. It was labelled “Flowers of Sulphur.” There was not much,

but there was enough. She put a teaspoonful in a wine-glass, and filled it up with water, for milk she had none. The sulphur obstinately floated on the top, of course ; so she mixed it after a fashion with her finger. Then she went back to Darrell. He shook his head when she explained to him what she wanted him to do. He was feeling too horribly weak to desire anything but to be left alone.

"But see," she pleaded, "I don't want you even to try to swallow it. Just hold it in your mouth, and let it lie on your throat only for a few seconds. I will lift your head. Ah, will you not try—just to please me?"

Her eyes were full of tears ; and Darrell seeing them—and because he loved her so he could have refused her nothing—did as she bade him, not once, but many times. Without going into further medical details, I may say that the remedy had the desired effect. In the course of a few hours he was able to speak, though only in a whisper, and in another hour could swallow a little soup. This last was painful to him beyond expression ; but he would not for worlds have grieved his gentle nurse by saying so. He asked anxiously once or twice if Carruthers had returned, and Leslie went again and again to the outer door to see if there was any sign of him. But all was still, save for the drip of the fast-melting snow from the roof and the surrounding out-houses.

The day wore on and died ; and still Carruthers did not come back. Leslie lit the little lantern and placed it in the loft window. Then she made herself a cup of coffee ; for she had tasted nothing since breakfast-time.

"I am horribly anxious about you," Darrell murmured restlessly, when he had watched her light the candle,

sweep up the hearth, and prepare to torture him with more sulphur. "I ought not to allow you to come near me, but—"

"But you can't help yourself, you sec," she said with a miserable little attempt at gaiety, as she lifted his head on her arm,

"Dear little child!" he whispered, looking up at her with a sad tenderness in his sunken eyes. "How can I thank you for all you have done for me? If I get well—I shall owe my life to you."

Leslie laid his head gently back on the pillows again. Then quite suddenly she burst into tears, and ran out of the room. Darrell thought she was anxious about Carruthers' safety; and he turned over, and hid his face on his arm with a weary sigh. For himself, he didn't much care just then, whether he got well, or whether he didn't. Indeed, if he had had any choice he would probably have preferred the latter, being weak to wretchedness, and wofully heartsick besides.

Eight o'clock—nine—ten. Still Carruthers did not come. Leslie fancied Darrell's voice and pulse had grown perceptibly weaker, though after the last application of sulphur his breathing had been much easier, and he could swallow liquids with less difficulty. But the girl knew that now, more than ever, it was of the last importance that he should have constant nourishment. And alas! she had given him the last of the brandy an hour ago. She had no more soup for him either; the little jar of Liebig was empty. As the hours went on a kind of sick despair came over her—a terrible sense of her own impotence. About midnight she opened the front door, and looked out. It was a dark, starless night,

and raining heavily. But no sound of footsteps or voices came through the darkness. She closed the door with a sinking heart, and went back to Darrell's room again, her childish face white, and set, and hopeless. For she had lost all hope now. He was lying quite still—so still that Leslie felt her heart almost stop beating. Had the end come so soon? She knelt beside the bed in an abandonment of grief and terror, and gazed wildly into the sick man's changed, haggard face—the face that in those few short days had become so inexpressibly dear to her.

He did not breathe.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," she cried, "have you left me then—and I love you so—I love you so!" And she hid her face in her hands in a tearless agony of sobs.

Darrell's voice made her start violently. His eyes were open, and shone with an infinite love and tenderness.

"Leslie!" he murmured indistinctly, as she seized his hand, and (hardly knowing what she did, poor child, in her passionate relief) held it to her lips. "Leslie—my dear little one—it is—too—late—" His voice died away; his eyes closed.

"*Lancelot!*" she shrieked, in a paroxysm of mingled grief and uncontrollable physical fear. "Speak to me—just one word!"

He did not answer. She laid her little hand on his heart. It was still.

Then she knew that he would never speak to her again.

She could not cry; and was conscious of a vague wonder that she could not. Trembling in every limb,

she crouched close to the bed, her eyes fastened on the worn, still face of which she already felt a nameless fear. And yet she dared not go out of the room. A nervous horror of she knew not what, possessed her, and froze her blood. Darrell's watch lay on the dressing-table; its loud ticking was distinctly audible through the stillness. The rain swept at intervals against the windows. The candle burnt down in its socket. The kitchen clock struck one; and the sound seemed to echo eerily through the silent house.

All at once there was a sound of voices and trampling feet outside—the noise of an opening door—a hurried exclamation—and the next moment Carruthers was in the room, followed by a dark, keen-eyed elderly man, who went at once to Darrell's bedside.

"Is he alive?" exclaimed Gilbert hoarsely, "or are we too late?"

Leslie, who had risen slowly to her feet, looked at him with stony, tearless eyes.

"You are too late!" she moaned drearily. "Too late—too late!"

"Nothing of the kind," broke in the doctor's kindly voice. "He'll do yet. Give me the brandy, Mr. Carruthers; and tell your man to heat some water. We'll bring him round, please God."

And they did bring him round. He had a splendid constitution, and he rallied wonderfully.

But Carruthers, who had shown powers of endurance almost superhuman in the face of the pain and weakness he had sternly combated for so many hours, now gave in suddenly and utterly; for the fell disease which already had him so firmly in its grasp, would be held at

bay no longer. By the next morning he was unable to speak; and almost before they realized that he was in danger, he was beyond all human help. He bade no farewell to the girl he loved, or the man whose life he had saved, but passed almost imperceptibly from a heavy, dream-like stupor, into death itself.

As for Leslie, she did not even know the poor fellow was ill until he had been dead some hours; for when she heard that Darrell still lived, and that he was out of immediate danger, she crept away to her own room, and lay down on her bed, utterly worn out and exhausted. And as the doctor forbade her entering the sick-room again, she consented to take the sleeping-draught he prepared for her, and slept soundly and dreamlessly for many hours. And for that sleep she never quite forgave herself. She felt certain she could have saved the one life as she had saved the other.

She went home that same afternoon (the afternoon of Carruthers' death, I mean), escorted by Wellings; and Aunt Priscilla, who had been mourning her as dead, received her with tears of joy. When Miss Carlyon heard her niece's story, she insisted that Captain Darrell should be removed to the Grange with as little delay as possible, where she nursed him back to convalescence herself—assisted, after a time, by Leslie.

Carruthers' death was a terrible blow to Darrell. He went abroad as soon as he was strong enough, and remained away for a year. But he carried with him Leslie Heath's promise, that at the end of that year she would become Leslie Darrell.

And she kept her word.

They are exceptionally happy, both in themselves and

in their children, the eldest of whom bears the name of the brave fellow whose memory will always live, undimmed and unforgotten, in both their hearts.

But the memory is a very sad one.



1. The first of these is the fact that the
2. second is the fact that the
3. third is the fact that the
4. fourth is the fact that the
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10. tenth is the fact that the

WITHIN AN ACE!



WITHIN AN ACE!



SIR DENZIL and Lady Carisbrooke had been married exactly six months; and (I don't expect to be believed, but it is true) in that time they had not had the faintest approach to a quarrel—no, nor even a “difference.” And this was the more remarkable, as Carisbrooke, besides possessing a strong will and a certain inherent obstinacy of disposition, also possessed what his male friends and acquaintances were wont to call “a devil of a temper.” Joan too (Lady Carisbrooke's baptismal name was Joan) could be upon occasion somewhat of a vixen. So far, however, these little idiosyncrasies had retired comparatively into the background. Carisbrooke was the most indulgent of husbands, and in little unimportant matters, yielded to his pretty wife with a good-humoured submission which might well lead one to suppose him easy-going to the last degree. Nevertheless, let him once make up his mind to a certain course to be pursued—or not to be pursued, as the case might be—and he was unyielding as a rock. His wife knew and acknowledged this, and she had hitherto given in on these occasions

with a bewitching grace which made her lord and master more in love with her than ever.

At the time of which I write they had come up from Lincolnshire for the season to their pretty house in May-fair. Society was pleased to make much of Lady Carisbrooke; and Denzil—who from his youth up had abhorred fashionable crushes of every description, and looked upon garden parties, flower-shows, afternoon and evening “at homes,” &c., &c., as distinct nuisances and unmitigated bores—was nevertheless proud enough of his charming wife to escort her patiently and dutifully to each and all of these places of entertainment without more than the average amount of grumbling. He had a gratified sense of possession, too, in noting how much admired she was, and smiled indulgently upon her innocent little coquetries and harmless semi-flirtations. Secure in her love for him, he was quite content that all men should pay her the homage which always falls to the lot of a lovely and fascinating woman. As a lover he had been jealous as Othello; as a husband, it appeared, he was quite the reverse. At least so he said.

“A jealous husband is the most contemptible of beings,” he had said to Joan once, soon after their marriage, in discussing some mutual friend’s domestic squabbles. “I should never be jealous of another man’s attentions to my wife—unless I had very good reason. And,” with a quick contraction of his brows, “if I *had* good reason neither of them should have the chance of rousing my jealousy a second time, I swear.”

As a matter of fact, Joan had never given him hitherto the faintest shadow of an excuse for being jealous. But that is a mere detail.

So things went on in this highly satisfactory way until one bright day towards the middle of June—a day which Joan was destined to remember all her life.

Carisbrooke had retired to his own particular den shortly after luncheon to write some important letters. These disposed of, he was just preparing for an undisturbed half-hour with the papers and his cigar-case, when the door opened, and his wife entered, dressed for driving.

"Going out, darling?" said Carisbrooke, passing his arm lightly round her as she stood beside him, her head barely reaching his shoulder. "You don't want me, I hope?"

"No," she said with a little upward smile, "I don't want you."

"By the way," Denzil continued with a slight frown, "I have just remembered there is something I want to say to you, Joan. I noticed that you gave George Fitzroy at least three waltzes last night, besides sitting out one or two more. Now, little woman, I don't like that sort of thing, especially with a fellow like Fitzroy, who——"

"But, Denzil," interrupted Joan, "he does waltz so *exquisitely*!"

"That's nothing to the point," was the hasty answer. "Another thing—I saw that that woman, his sister, Mrs. Damer, had left cards here the other day. Now, look here, darling, I don't want you to have anything to do with either of them. He is a confounded puppy, and—in short, for several reasons, I particularly object to him as an acquaintance for you. As for Mrs. Damer—well—er—in more ways than one I consider her fearfully

bad form. I am not strait-laced, but there are some things at which I *do* draw the line. So drop them, darling. I meant to have spoken to you about this before." And Carisbrooke, evidently considering the matter settled, kissed his wife and selected a cigar.

"But, Denzil, dear," exclaimed Joan in rather dismayed tones, "I have promised to drive over to Mrs. Damer's this very afternoon. She and I, and her brother and Captain Eyre, are all going to the Colinderies."

"You will certainly do nothing of the kind," he answered quickly, pausing in the act of lighting his cigar.

"But, dear," she remonstrated, "I have promised."

"Then you must send a note to decline," said her husband in his most decided tones.

"Oh, I can't do that, Denzil."

"Nevertheless, darling, you will do it to please me, I know," he replied, leaning his back against the mantelpiece, and surveying her with quizzically down-drooped eyelids. He was a good-looking fellow, was Carisbrooke; tall, well-built, thorough-bred—an Englishman and a gentleman from the crown of his well-shaped head to the soles of his well-cut boots.

"Won't you, dear?" he continued, with the suspicion of a smile just visible under the sweep of his brown moustache.

"No, Denzil," Joan answered, after an infinitesimal pause. "You know I would do anything in reason to please you; but you can't expect me to break a promise."

"As to that," he said quietly, "I think you promised, not so *very* long ago—if my memory serves me—to have a particular regard for any wishes of mine, did you not?"

"Well!" with a saucy little laugh. "And *you* promised to 'cherish' me, did you not? And it is not cherishing me to thwart my wishes. So, my most autocratic of husbands, I am afraid I must disobey you!"

Carisbrooke removed his cigar from his lips and laid it down with deliberate care.

"My dear little girl," he said, taking her hands in his and speaking very gravely and tenderly, "you have yet to learn, it seems, that when I say a thing, I mean it. I do not often assert my authority; but in this matter I will be obeyed. You understand me? I *forbid* you to accompany Mrs. Damer and her brother!"

She looked up at him as he towered above her, tall and commanding, his face determined though tender, his eyes calmly authoritative. He was some fifteen years older than she (her twentieth birthday had yet to arrive), and she was just a trifle afraid of him at times.

"Of course if you *forbid* it," she said after a brief silent struggle, "there is an end of the matter."

"That's a good little wife," he replied fondly, encircling her waist with his arm and stooping to kiss her.

But she moved away, and said coldly, "Don't, please. Oh, it is all very well for you to laugh, but I consider you both unreasonable and tyrannical. You are treating me like a child."

"So you are a child," he answered with a caressing smile; "and a very pretty little child, too. Surely I have not seen that gown before, have I? It's very fetching."

"Oh, don't be silly, Denzil," she said impatiently. Then, after a minute's pause, "I'm sure I don't know *what* Mrs. Damer will think of me!"

"What Mrs. Damer thinks, or does not think, is of very little consequence, I imagine," observed Sir Denzil with a shrug of his square shoulders.

"And pray what excuse am I to make?" went on Joan in a sarcastic little voice. "Am I to say that I cannot keep my engagement because my husband will not allow me? She will laugh at me."

"Has respect for a husband's wishes so utterly gone out of fashion?" he inquired gravely. Then he added, "Nevertheless, Joan, you know very well you need not put it in that way. Simply send a note saying you find you cannot go. And, as I said before, drop the acquaintance for the future."

She made an impatient little movement, then said resentfully, "You are exceedingly overbearing and selfish, Denzil! I never interfere with anything *you* wish to do."

"Well, no, darling, I should fancy you *don't*," her husband answered with the slightest possible elevation of his eyebrows.

"And why should I always give in and you *never*?" she went on passionately. "I *will* go!"

He looked at her steadily for a second or two without speaking, and her eyes fell.

"Of course," she murmured hurriedly, "I shall not make any other engagement with her if you don't wish it, but I shall go with her to-day, as I have promised."

"No, Joan, you shall *not*!" replied Carisbrooke in a very low voice, but with a sudden flash in his dark eyes.

"Yes, I shall," she went on excitedly. "I will not be your slave, Denzil, though I am your wife. I will *not* be ordered about, obedient to your slightest commands,

however unreasonable—terrified to move or speak without your permission.”

Denzil was very far from being in a laughing humour by this time, but an involuntary smile, which he could not repress, curved his lips at the glaring injustice of this last remark. And seeing that smile, fleeting though it was, Joan became reckless, and flung prudence to the winds.

“Why don’t you give your real reason?” she demanded with scornful emphasis, “and say you are jealous of George Fitzroy?”

Carisbrooke flushed darkly; then became very pale. *His* temper—long kept down—was up now, and it was only by a violent effort that he restrained the furious words that rushed to his lips.

“You are forgetting yourself, I think,” he said, controlling his voice with supreme difficulty.

“And you are losing your temper, I think,” returned Joan with a short laugh. “However, I have made up my mind to go, and not all you can say shall prevent me. And as for dropping George Fitzroy’s acquaintance, I shall do nothing of the kind. He is one of the nicest men I know, and at any rate he has the merit of knowing how to keep his temper!”

“Very well,” he replied in a curiously repressed voice; “so be it. We will consider the discussion ended.”

And seating himself in an easy-chair, he took up a newspaper, and was soon apparently unconscious of his wife’s presence. His voice and manner were so calm that Joan hardly realized what a passion he was in. The hand that held the newspaper shook slightly; that was all. Joan lingered, not content, seemingly, with her

victory. Woman-like, she desired not only the actual, but the verbal capitulation of the enemy.

A few minutes passed, during which Carisbrooke's temper cooled somewhat, and settled down into an icy, offended calm.

"You must see, Denzil, how unreasonable it is——" began Joan.

"Pardon me," her husband interrupted her coldly, turning his eyes upon her for a second, but not otherwise moving, "you misunderstand me, I fear. I have no longer the slightest desire to interfere with your arrangements in any way. Pray do not let me detain you. Allow me."

And with a face of exasperating indifference he rose, and ceremoniously held the door open while she passed out. Then he threw himself into his chair again, in about the worst temper he had been in for years—which is saying a good deal—and made use of some violent and profane expressions anent the lady and gentleman under discussion, which would have made his little wife's hair stand on end if she had heard them. As a matter of fact, he had heard worse things of Mrs. Damer than he cared to repeat to Joan. As for her brother, he simply disliked him in an unreasoning kind of way. But he had no feeling of jealousy regarding him, he told himself scornfully. He felt furious that Joan should have accused him of such a thing. Fitzroy was a handsome fellow (indeed he was not unlike Carisbrooke himself), and a great favourite with women—and certainly of late Joan and he had seemed on very good terms——Here he frowned heavily, and bit his lips with almost nervous force. Pshaw! surely he was not on the way to become the jealous fool his wife apparently considered him!

As for that self-willed little person, she was standing on the mat outside the door, already half-repentant. After all, she reflected, was it worth while to vex her husband for such a trifle? He was invariably so indulgent to her; so attentive to her slightest wish, almost before she could express it; and as he had said, it was very rarely he asserted his authority. He must have some good reason for his objection to Mrs. Damer, and in truth that lady was a little—just a *little*—too *pronounced* for Joan's own taste, though she was undoubtedly clever and amusing. As for Mr. Fitzroy—well, perhaps he had been more attentive than was absolutely necessary. And finally, she did not really care two straws if she never saw either brother or sister again. Certainly they were not worth quarrelling about. Dear old Denzil! how angry he had looked! It was their first disagreement since their marriage—At this point in her reflections she turned, opened the door again, and went in, fully prepared to make the *amende honorable*—thereby, I am aware, meriting the scorn of all strong-minded women.

Carisbrooke did not turn his head as she entered; nevertheless she knew that he was aware of her presence. After a moment's hesitation she closed the door, and going towards him laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Denzil!" she said in a very small voice.

"Well?" he answered coldly, without raising his eyes from the paper he was apparently absorbed in.

"Denzil—I—I am not going!"

To this announcement the person addressed deigned no reply. He took a paper-knife from a table near him, cut a few more pages of the *Saturday*, and deliberately

went on with the leading article. His face had a stern, inflexible look, quite new to Joan—a look which boded ill for reconciliation.

“Denzil,” she faltered, her pretty eyes growing dim, “don’t look like that! I am not going. I will write to say so.”

But Denzil was feeling particularly savage and impracticable just then. He rose, and quietly removed the hand that lay on his arm.

“If you imagine you are gratifying me by staying at home,” he observed, speaking very calmly and distinctly, and looking down at her with an expression in his handsome eyes which sent her heart down into her boots, “pray dismiss the idea at once. It is a matter of the utmost indifference to me whether you go or stay.” He struck a match as he spoke, and re-lit his cigar with a care and deliberation which under the circumstances were simply brutal. He was fully aware of this; but for the life of him, he couldn’t have helped it.

Joan, petrified at this unexpected rebuff, stood for a few seconds in indignant silence, with quivering lips and changing colour; then, with a haughty gesture of her brown head, went quietly out of the room.

As Carisbrooke left the house some minutes later, he had the pleasure of seeing his wife step into her smart victoria, direct the man to Mrs. Damer’s house in Cadogan Place, and drive off without vouchsafing so much as a look in his direction.

A week passed, and during that time the demeanour of husband and wife towards each other was characterized by a deadly, freezing courtesy; indeed on all possible occasions they ignored each other completely.

And both, though they would have scorned to own it, were distinctly and undeniably miserable. Joan felt bitterly hurt that Denzil had so coldly repulsed her offer of submission and wifely obedience; while he, for his part, had by this time worked himself up into such a fit of unreasoning obstinacy that Joan might have abased herself to the very dust before him without softening him in the least. But she showed no desire to so humiliate herself, and as the days went on Carisbrooke's thoughts grew more and more furiously bitter. For if Joan had never given him cause for jealousy before, he certainly might be forgiven for thinking she did so now. She flirted outrageously with Fitzroy—there was not the slightest doubt of that. And he had no manner of objection to be so flirted with, though, as it happened, he entertained no special admiration for Lady Carisbrooke, beyond the conviction that she was an exceedingly pretty woman, and “awfully jolly to talk to, don't you know.” But after a time Fitzroy found himself snubbed, neglected, and generally given the cold shoulder—a defection on Joan's part which he took very philosophically. He was not half a bad fellow after all, and he had a sincere liking for Carisbrooke, in spite of the other's invariably freezing demeanour towards him.

Poor Joan! She was tired of laughing and talking so gaily while her heart was so heavy. Her feelings alternated between a hot resentment against her husband, and a wild longing to be reconciled to him. His stern, cold, repellent face and manner chilled her, and struck her with a curious sense of desolation. Were things always to be like this between them? she wondered drearily. Meanwhile her pretty face grew grave and pale, her eyes heavy and wistful.

One morning towards the end of the season, the Carisbrookes were seated at breakfast. Denzil had just entered the room, and having bid his wife a chilling "good morning," was soon absorbed in his letters. Joan was looking really ill this morning. She had lain awake crying all night, which performance had, not unnaturally, given her a severe headache. Presently her husband pushed aside his correspondence and silently addressed himself to his breakfast. When the meal was half over he said, in the cold formal voice in which he always addressed her now:

"Did my mother say she intended coming up to-morrow, Joan? I think you said she had written to you to that effect?"

"Yes; she said she was coming to-morrow," was the listless answer. "She is going back on Saturday."

"Then you had better return with her. I intend leaving home for a time, and shall probably start to-morrow evening."

"To-morrow," she echoed faintly. Then after a pause she asked, "Are you—going abroad?"

"No," rather curtly. "I am going down to Scotland to spend a week or so with Berkeley."

"Shall you be away—for long?"

"I really cannot say. I may take a run over to Hamburg, with some fellows who talk of going; but it is quite uncertain. I will take another cup of coffee, if you please," he added, as he unfolded the *Times*.

There was perfect silence for a few minutes after Joan had handed him his cup, and at the end of that time, Carisbrooke, looking up, became aware that his wife was startlingly pale, and that her lips were trembling convulsively.

"What is the matter, Joan? Are you ill?" he said, looking at her keenly.

But instead of answering, Lady Carisbrooke covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. Now this was absolutely the first time Carisbrooke had ever seen his wife cry, and the sight alarmed and distressed him beyond measure. He rose hastily, and coming round to where she sat, bent over her anxiously, almost forgetting to be cold and indifferent.

"Joan," he said in deeply concerned tones, "what is it? Can I get you anything?"

Joan rose hastily, and was about to rush from the room, when with a sudden movement he caught her in his arms.

"Is it possible that you are crying because you—because you don't want me to go away, Joan?" he whispered rather unsteadily.

But Joan was excited, and overstrung, and angry; angry with Denzil because he had hit upon the exact reason why she was crying, and angry with herself because it *was* the reason. So she forced back her tears, checked her sobs, and tried to draw herself away from her husband's arms.

"No, no, not at all; I am not so foolish," she answered almost hysterically. "I was crying because—I have a headache this morning, and feel so—so nervous. Please let me go, Denzil, and don't be so tiresome," she concluded with a touch of impatience in her tone.

He released her instantly.

"Has it come to that?" he said, drawing a long breath and growing rather white. "Is my very touch so repulsive to you?" As he spoke he leaned somewhat

heavily against the mantelpiece, and drew his hand across his forehead.

"What a fool I am!" he muttered between his teeth. Then, without taking any further notice of his wife, he flung himself out of the room, and a few minutes later out of the house.

Thus the very opportunity Joan had longed for had come—only to be missed, disregarded, and bitterly regretted when too late—like a few other opportunities we wot of.

Carisbrooke did not turn up at lunch, and in the afternoon Joan drove out to do some shopping, firmly resolved to make her peace with her offended husband at dinner-time. She had just come out of a certain well-known costumier's in Bond Street, and was waiting impatiently for her carriage; for the coachman, probably thinking she would be some time, had driven so far up the street as to be out of sight. All at once a hansom whirled rapidly past. Joan caught sight of a portmanteau and gun-case on the top, and inside—did her eyes deceive her?—a well-known grey travelling-coat, a closely-cropped brown head partially turned away from her, a glimpse of a heavy moustache—her husband without a doubt! Joan's heart stood still, and then beat furiously. He was going away to-day, instead of to-morrow—going without even bidding her good-bye. She looked wildly up the street. The carriage was not in sight. In a moment she had hailed an empty hansom.

"Follow that hansom in front, the one with the white horse!" she gasped excitedly as she climbed in. "Quick. I will give you a sovereign if you overtake it."

"All right, miss," replied the man, with a grin that made poor Joan's cheeks burn.

The horse sprang forward, and they were soon spinning up the street as fast as the many vehicles collected there would permit them. The other hansom had a good start, but they gradually gained upon it. Sometimes a block occurred, and they had to stand still for a time, and then poor Joan's heart stood still too. What if she should be too late? She could not endure the torturing thought that they had parted in estrangement—parted for months, perhaps. How could Denzil be so cruel, so unforgiving? He might have known she did not mean what she said this morning. Perhaps he had sought her to bid her good-bye, and found her gone! This thought drove her half frantic.

Away they went at a rattling pace, the white horse still alarmingly far ahead—along Oxford Street, up Gower Street, through Gordon Square, always keeping the other hansom in sight, but never overtaking it. At last they turned into one of the northern terminuses (*which*, Joan hadn't an idea). The white horse was just trotting off as they drove alongside the kerb, and Joan caught a glimpse of a tall grey-coated figure disappearing into the booking office. She sprang out almost before the cab stopped, tripped and almost fell, dropping the gold coin she held, and thus causing some delay. In another minute she had rushed on to the platform.

"Take seats! Take seats!" she heard the porters cry, amid banging of doors and rumbling of trucks. She had never thought of taking a ticket—indeed, she had no idea where to take it for—she never stopped to think that this might *not* be the Scotch train, but ran wildly after the owner of the grey travelling-coat, who, striding on in front, suddenly quickened his pace to a run, and sprang hastily into an empty first-class carriage, for the

whistle had sounded and the train was just moving off. In a moment Joan, panting and breathless, had reached the door, scrambled in, and precipitated herself into the arms of—her husband? Alas, no!

"Lady Carisbrooke!" said a man's surprised voice—not Denzil's.

Joan looked up with a sharp cry of horror, and found herself *tête-à-tête* with George Fitzroy!

For one second she paused—petrified; then flew to the door, and had already thrown it open, when her companion dragged her unceremoniously backward, and shut the door again.

"Lady Carisbrooke!" he exclaimed as she struggled to free herself. "Are you mad? You can't get out now. Do you not see the rate at which we are going? What on earth is the matter?"

She sank on to the seat, half fainting. For to her inexpressible anguish and dismay she had seen her husband's white incredulous face on the fast-receding platform. He must have seen them both. Good Heavens! what would he think? What had she done? Overcome with mortification, fatigue, and despair, Lady Carisbrooke, for the second time that day, burst into tears. Her companion, profoundly dismayed and bewildered, tried to calm her, but in vain.

"What *is* the matter?" he entreated distractedly. "What has happened? For pity's sake don't distress yourself in this way!"

But it was some time before Joan could speak. Then, in breathless, incoherent sentences, she sobbed out the unfortunate mistake she had made.

"*Why* had you that coat on?" she concluded passion-

ately and unreasonably. "You know Sir Denzil has one just like it. And of course, when I saw it I never doubted that—that—Oh, what *shall* I do?"

Fitzroy cast a downward glance of contrition at the unlucky garment in question. But he looked serious. As matters stood, he could not but acknowledge that it was an awkward situation. For he too, as he leaned out to shut the carriage door, had caught a glimpse of Carisbrooke's face, and the more he thought of the expression it had worn the less he liked it. He had also seen that Carisbrooke was arm in arm with Dan Fothergill, the most inveterate club-newslinger in all Pall Mall and St. James' Street. An almost ludicrously bewildered look of amazement had adorned Fothergill's visage, and Fitzroy knew very well how this unlucky little episode would expand, and lengthen, and assume fearful proportions under that gentleman's skilful manipulation. Now, there had been quite enough gossip afloat of late concerning Fitzroy's whilom devotion to Lady Carisbrooke, and as he reflected upon this his brows contracted with extreme annoyance. Both men had seen him, he knew. Indeed he had almost brushed against them as he passed. He had a particular objection, just then, to *pose*, however innocently, as Lady Carisbrooke's lover. For one thing, he knew it would be next to impossible to explain to an obstinate, hot-headed fellow like Carisbrooke how the thing had really happened, especially in the light of the recent very pronounced flirtation which had justly aroused the latter's indignation. In the second place, he had just become engaged to a very pretty little girl down in Blankshire, whose family, indeed, he was now on his way to visit. And his *fiancée* had, until two days ago, been extremely jealous of Lady Carisbrooke. So that,

altogether, things promised to be particularly pleasant and entertaining all round. The train did not stop, he knew, until it reached Combe. His *fiancée* was to meet him there. And after that—the deluge! Fitzroy felt that the Fates were distinctly unreasonable.

“Oh, don’t cry like that, Lady Carisbrooke!” he exclaimed at last, with a smothered ring of irritation in his tone. “You—er—you’ll make yourself ill, you know.” Then after a pause, he added, “I’m sure I don’t know what the deuce is to be done. Carisbrooke is such an obstinate brute when he takes an idea into his head—I beg your pardon, but you know he really is. And he—er—he’s sure to be in a regular way.” Here the speaker walked to the other side of the carriage, and swore a little under his breath, viciously and deliberately. Somewhat relieved by this comparatively silent ebullition, he turned to his companion, who had stopped crying, and now sat looking up at him with lovely, distracting, though angry eyes swimming in tears. Certainly she was marvellously pretty, he reflected almost casually. Small wonder Carisbrooke was mad with jealousy; for she was a provoking little witch, as Fitzroy well knew. Just then the train began to slacken speed. Joan rushed to the window and looked out.

“I believe we are going to stop at Annesley,” she exclaimed eagerly. “Yes, we are. I shall get out here and catch the next train up to town.”

“But,” hesitated Fitzroy, “your husband, you know. He—er—I mean, had I not better go back with you and—er—explain, perhaps?”

“Oh, dear, no; that would make it fifty times worse,” she answered with a hysterical little laugh. “You don’t

know how dreadful things have been lately, *all* because of you! Ah here we are," she added, as the train steamed into the little station. In another moment she was on the platform.

"I don't half like leaving you here alone," said Fitzroy anxiously. Then to a passing porter, "When is the first train up to town?"

"8.25, sir. Last to-night," was the answer.

The whistle sounded. A few hasty words, a grasp of the hand, and the train was out of sight round the curve, leaving Joan standing alone and forlorn on the platform. It was a small wayside station, where trains only stopped when there were any passengers for Valdene, a large estate some miles away. A pompous-looking old gentleman was the cause of the stoppage to-day, and Joan blessed him. He got into a carriage that was waiting, and was driven rapidly away. The porter retired into the little ticket-office to await the arrival of the last up train, and Joan was left in sole possession. She looked at her watch; it was twenty-five minutes past seven. She had an hour to wait. It was a lovely evening, and she made up her mind to walk a little way along the road. It would help to pass the time; and to sit still was impossible. So she set off at a quick pace along the hedge-bound lane which called itself a road, and led, presumably, to the as yet unseen village of Annesley. She felt unbearably anxious and miserable. Her husband's white horrified face, the stunned, half-incredulous look in his eyes haunted her. If he had been angry and unforgiving before, what would he be now? If she only had not been so mad as to repulse him so coldly this morning! It was a long time since he had

spoken to her so kindly. How *could* she? And now it might be too late—too late for anything but misery! She walked on and on, never thinking of the time; her poor little heart growing heavier and heavier with every step. All at once she remembered that she had all the way to go back again, and hastily pulled out her watch. Could it be possible? The hands pointed to a quarter past eight! She had only ten minutes to get back to the station, and it was such a long, long way off! She ran along the road for some distance, then stopped. She could never get there in time, she thought, despairingly. And yet, stay—she might cut across the fields; that would save her fully five minutes, for the road took a long winding sweep just here, and the train might be a little behind time. Quick as thought she scrambled over the low stone wall, and ran across the first field, quaking inwardly at the thought of possible bulls; for she was an arrant little coward where horned cattle were concerned. But running gave her a pain in her side, and she was obliged to walk quite slowly across the next field. Alas! the station was a long way off yet. A distant whistle made her start; she caught her foot on a half-hidden stone, stumbled forward, and fell, doubling one foot under her. In an instant she had struggled up again; but an anguished knife-like pain through her right ankle turned her faint and sick, and made her sink to the ground with a low sobbing cry. A sense of terrified despair came over her. How was she to get home? How get to the station? How even move from where she lay? Just then, she heard another and a nearer whistle, a fast-approaching vibrating roar, which gradually ceased. The train had come in! In an

incredibly short time she heard it shriek its way into the distance again, and once more silence reigned. Poor Joan, it was too much! The thought that she might lie there helpless for hours—all night—all next day—filled her with terror and dismay. It had begun to rain slightly, too, and would soon be dark. She slowly raised herself, and once more put the injured foot to the ground. It bent under her. With a sharp cry of agony she slipped back into her former position and lost consciousness.

When she came to herself again it was almost quite dark, and it was still raining. Through the stillness she distinctly heard heavy footsteps behind her. They came nearer, nearer, then stopped. Straining her eyes upward, in the dim, fast-fading light, Joan saw that the new-comer was an old woman, tall, broad-shouldered, and with a rugged though kind-looking face, and keen black eyes.

"Holy Vargin!" exclaimed this personage, bending down to look into Joan's white little face. "What's this, at all, at all? What ails ye, acushla? Is it ill ye are? Or is it the fut? Och, an' ye can't stir I see. Faith, thin, ye'll have to let me carry yez." And without more ado, she lifted Lady Carisbrooke's slight figure in her arms, and bore her away in the direction of a small tumble-down cottage at the corner of the next field, which Joan remembered to have passed as she came along. But oh! the agony of that short transit! Every step of her bearer's was like a knife-thrust to poor Joan; for her injured foot was hanging down, and the pain was excruciating.

"Oh, put me down," she gasped with white lips.
 "Please put me down!"

"Whist! whist! now," was the only reply, as the old Irishwoman's pace became more rapid, and Joan's torture more unbearable. "You lie still, and Nan Connor 'll let no hurt come to yez. For sure it's the pretty little cratur ye are, as far as I can see in this devil's light."

At last they reached the cottage, which was much more attractive inside than out. The floor was cleanly scrubbed; so were the deal chairs and table, and a gay scarlet geranium stood in a large pot on the window-sill.

"There ye are!" said the mistress of this domain, as she laid her burden down on a small truckle bed in the corner. "Kape yer mind aisy, now; I'll doctor yer fut. But ye'll have to stop here to-night, av coorse."

"Oh, no," cried poor Joan, "I must go home—I must go home."

"And where's home?" was the curt inquiry.

"In town—in London."

"Faith, thin, and the last train's gone over an hour an' half since; so ye'll just have to contint yerself," said Nan drily, as she lit the candle and the neatly-laid little fire almost simultaneously. "Now don't be afther cryin' like a great baby," she continued, kneeling down beside her guest; "give me the fut. Aisy now." And in an unconcerned but not untender way, she took off the little shoe and stocking, bathed the poor swollen ankle—which was not broken, but only badly sprained—and wrapped it up skilfully in long strips of linen.

"I *must* send a telegram to my husband!" exclaimed the patient distractedly, when Nan's self-imposed task was over. Then she remembered that it was too late to send a telegram. Good Heavens! she thought in a

panic of fear, what would Denzil think if she remained away all night, with no explanation of such a dubious proceeding—under the circumstances!

"I must write a note," she said feverishly, sitting up and pushing back her hair. "And will you," looking entreatingly at Nan, "will you please take it to the nearest post town—now—at once? Never mind leaving me. See, I will give you a sovereign if you do."

Nan nodded and promptly accepted the coin, while Joan tore a page out of the note-book in her purse, and pencilled a few hurried loving and repentant lines to her husband, telling him where she was, how she had got there, and subscribing herself, "Your most loving and faithful wife, Joan."

This done, a difficulty presented itself. She had, of course, no envelope. But a happy thought struck her. She had in her pocket a letter which had come yesterday from old Lady Carisbrooke. She took the envelope, turned it inside out with laborious care, addressed it also in pencil and wrote "Immediate" in the corner. Fortunately she had a stamp.

"Now—take it—do be quick—as quick as you can," she said earnestly.

Nan, who had been testing the value of the coin she had received in various ways, such as biting it in several places, ringing it on the table, etc., now hid it away in some mysterious part of her dress, took the letter, and disappeared into the rain and darkness. Joan lay back on the hard little bed, faint, and sick, and miserable. Her foot was intensely painful, and her head was throbbing dully. She was shivering with cold, for her clothes were quite wet, and the fire was decidedly in its infancy,

She was nervous, too, at being left there alone in the dark. What if the old woman did not come back at all? Joan wished she had not given her the sovereign until she had come back. What if some tramp came? The night grew darker—darker. The rain was rushing down outside. The candle flickered eerily.

* * * * *

It is quite beyond my pen to adequately describe Carisbrooke's state of mind when he saw the train glide out of the station, and realized that it was bearing away from him his wife—yes, his own wife—with George Fitzroy as her companion. No wonder she had repulsed him this morning, he thought half stupidly. He saw it all now.

So—it was all over! All over—all over! The words seemed to beat into his brain as he stood, stunned, paralyzed, unable to move or speak.

For one terrible moment he felt he was about to choke; he reeled slightly, a crimson mist surged before his eyes. Then with a mighty effort he pulled himself together, and became conscious that Fothergill had caught his arm, and was regarding him with genuine concern largely mingled with compassion.

"Come and have a brandy and soda, old chap," he said. "You look like a corpse. And, by Jove! no wonder," he added *sotto voce*.

But Carisbrooke shook himself free.

"Leave me alone!" he said in a strange, hoarse voice. "For the love of Heaven leave me alone!"

"Oh, look here, you know, Carisbrooke—" began the other persuasively.

"Go to the devil!" was the fierce rejoinder. And flinging aside his friend's detaining hand, Carisbrooke turned abruptly on his heel, and walked with quick uneven steps through the booking hall, and so into the street beyond.

Fothergill shrugged his shoulders. He felt really sorry for Carisbrooke; but his sorrow did not prevent his relating the story (as a profound secret, of course) at several of the clubs in the course of the evening, with various little odds and ends of imaginary details as they occurred to his fertile fancy.

By the afternoon of the next day it was all over town that Lady Carisbrooke had eloped with George Fitzroy.

Meanwhile Carisbrooke, with a look like death in his eyes, had made his way to his solitary home. He shut himself into his den and sat down at the table. Was he going *mad*? he wondered. What was this awful degrading thing that had happened to him? His wife—his little Joan—to what horrible, nameless depths had she fallen! His lips whitened and quivered. A terrible look came into his eyes, a look born of the fierce overmastering longing that possessed him to have his fingers on the throat of this man who had stolen his wife's heart—her diabolically false heart—and left him dishonoured and desolate. Somehow he had never thought of such an ending as this. He had been bitterly, furiously jealous of his wife's marked preference for Fitzroy's society. He had been miserably conscious of her changed feelings towards himself. But this! this disgrace! this dishonour!—*this*! He laid his head down on his arm, and remained quite still for a long, long time.

A knock came to the door. It was the butler, to know if Sir Denzil would like dinner served, as it was already past nine. Carisbrooke dismissed him with an impatient gesture. Dinner! The thought of food sickened him. There are not many griefs, I know, poignant enough to render an Englishman indifferent to his dinner; but there are a few. This was one.

Hours passed. Night fell and gave place to early dawn; but Sir Denzil sat there still, his head between his hands, his heart torn by fierce, anguished, delirious thoughts. He cursed his own half-stunned inaction that had prevented his following them while there was yet time—following them to shoot the fellow like the hound he was, before the eyes of the woman who loved him, it seemed, more than “name and fame” and honour.

And now—what remained? Should he descend to the filthy depths of the Divorce Court? Drag his name—his mother’s name—through all the sickening degrading details such a course would entail—to be gloated over by all grades, all classes? No. His very soul shrank from that. There was another way. And there, in the light of the strengthening summer dawn, he raised his hand to Heaven, and swore a fearful oath that he, and he only, should be the avenger of his own dishonour. Oh, but his thoughts were bitter—cruel—devilish! God keep us from such thoughts!

At last he rose and threw open the window to the morning air, for he felt dizzy and half suffocated. The fresh breeze that rushed in revived him somewhat; but it did not cool his burning brain. Then he went heavily and wearily upstairs to his dressing-room, his usually quick firm step dragging and listless, like that of a very old man.

Half an hour later he came down again. The morning post had come, and a little pile of letters lay on the breakfast table beside his plate. One was addressed in pencil. He knew the quaint upright handwriting, hurried and shaky though it was; and at the sight of it his face grew white to the lips. He rose and struck a match; then with a hand that shook slightly, he deliberately held the unopened envelope in the flame until it was consumed all but one corner, which he threw with the burnt match into the grate. His breath came a little quickly as he sat down at the table again, and mechanically opened and flung aside his other letters. He had not eaten anything since noon the previous day, but he felt that the slightest morsel would have choked him just then. So he swallowed half a cup of coffee, then went across the hall to his smoking-room, where he opened a small drawer in a cabinet, and took from thence—something which he regarded earnestly and critically, and finally put in the breast pocket of his coat. Then he went back to the dining-room. He felt curiously giddy and deadly sick. A cold clammy perspiration seemed breaking out all over him. He staggered to the sideboard, and pouring out half a tumbler of brandy, drank it off hastily. Then he rang the bell, told one of the men to call a hansom, and directed the driver to Fitzroy's rooms in Jermyn Street. As luck would have it, another hansom drove up just as Carisbrooke had dismissed his, and from it stepped Fitzroy himself. He looked harassed and anxious, but an expression of positive relief came over his face as he recognized Sir Denzil.

"Carisbrooke!" he exclaimed, holding out his hand, "I am inexpressibly glad to see you."

At the sight of him the other turned perfectly livid.

"Thank you," he made answer between his set teeth, looking at Fitzroy steadily, and taking no notice of his outstretched hand. "I am fortunate. I hardly hoped to find you—here!"

"You wouldn't have found me here," said Fitzroy, rather surprised at his manner, "if I hadn't been obliged to run up for an hour to attend to some confounded business. I have to be off again by the 12.30 from Paddington."

"So?" returned Carisbrooke with a strange smile. "Nevertheless, perhaps you will spare me a few minutes. Can I see you—alone?"

"Yes, of course. Come up. This is the first time you've honoured me with a visit. I hope it won't be the last. By Jove! Carisbrooke," he added hastily, "you are looking awfully ill."

A curious light came into the other's eyes; but he made no answer, and they reached Fitzroy's rooms in silence. The latter closed the door, and a dark flush rose to his forehead as he said hurriedly, for something indefinable in the other's expression made him uneasy, "I hope—that is to say—er—in fact, Lady Carisbrooke—she was afraid—"

"That I might insist upon her returning to me?" interrupted Carisbrooke with a pale smile. "Oh, no. Oh, no. She need have no fear."

"What the devil do you mean, Carisbrooke?" exclaimed Fitzroy, looking at the speaker in haughty surprise. Then as a sudden possibility flashed across his mind, he added hastily, "You don't mean to say—is it possible that your wife has not—that she—" He

stopped suddenly, for there was something awful in the look the other turned upon him.

"Curse you!" Carisbrooke articulated in a choked voice. "*Curse* you!" Then with a supreme effort he controlled himself, walked to the door, and locked it.

Fitzroy regarded him in amazement.

"Look here, Carisbrooke," he said in rather abrupt tones, "I wish you would tell me what's the matter with you. You look most infernally queer."

"Yes, I feel rather queer," was the reply in a perfectly unemotional voice. With the words he drew from his pocket a pair of small but deadly-looking revolvers, and laid them on the table. As he did so, he fixed his eyes on his companion—and smiled.

Fitzroy, seeing that smile, felt his very blood run cold.

"Good Heavens! Carisbrooke, are you *mad*?" he said, after a moment's speechless pause.

"Not yet," said the other, in a voice almost deadly in its quietness as contrasted with the terrible expression in his eyes. "No, not yet!"

"Then what do you mean? What insane idea have you got into your head? There is some terrible mistake here. If you would only let me explain—"

But Carisbrooke interrupted him.

"Your explanations come too late," he said, speaking hoarsely and deliberately, and with deadly significance. "They should have been made—*yesterday*!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Fitzroy, turning pale, "is it possible that you imagine—"

"We are losing time," broke in the other, with glittering eyes and labouring breath, though his face and voice were horribly, unnaturally calm. "Your lies will avail

you nothing. D——n you!—take your choice of these pistols! Only one of us, I swear, shall leave this room alive. Fate has sent you into my hands sooner than I had hoped. But you should never have escaped me. I should have tracked you at last, and shot you like the cur you are—as I shall do now! Are you ready?”

“For Heaven’s sake, Carisbrooke, listen to reason,” exclaimed Fitzroy roughly. “You are labouring under a fearful mistake. It is—”

“You are not *afraid*, are you?” Carisbrooke interrupted him coldly and steadily, but with a dangerous gleam in his eyes. “I know you to be a scoundrel—and I know you to be a liar!—are you a coward as well?” As he spoke the last words he struck Fitzroy sharply across the face with his gloves.

The hot blood rushed to the other’s forehead.

“Oh, by Heaven, this is too much!” he exclaimed furiously, springing at Carisbrooke’s throat.

But the latter held him back.

“Is the provocation sufficient?” he said in clear, distinct tones, “or will you stand yet more pronounced insult?”

The studied insolence of this speech roused all the evil in Fitzroy’s nature. With a fierce oath he seized one of the pistols.

“Yes, they are loaded,” said Carisbrooke calmly, as he took up the remaining one. “We will put the table between us. That will make it pretty sure, I fancy.” There was something horrible, almost devilish, in the deadly composure with which he said this.

Fitzroy was a brave fellow, but his heart beat quickly as he thought of the sweet little woman who had

promised to be his wife—whose lips he had kissed only that morning.

The two men faced each other—the one pale, stern, with compressed lips and flashing eyes; the other ghastly, panting for breath, but still with that cruel, mocking smile on his lips.

Three seconds later both had fired, almost simultaneously.

Carisbrooke, as a rule, was a dead shot; but to-day his hand shook slightly, and his bullet only grazed his opponent's arm, inflicting a mere flesh wound.

Fitzroy's aim, however, was a truer one. With a sharp exclamation Carisbrooke fell forward across the table, shot through the left lung. But the next moment he had dragged himself upright, and convulsively grasped the back of a chair with his left hand. Fitzroy, his resentment fled, threw down his weapon and sprang forward to the other's assistance. But Carisbrooke, white as death, and swaying uncertainly from side to side, waved him fiercely backward.

"Stand back!" he gasped wildly. "Stand back! You shall not escape me—by——!"

But even as he spoke a torrent of blood choked his utterance; he staggered slightly backwards, raised one hand quickly to his breast, and let the revolver fall to the ground. Then, turning upon Fitzroy a look of mingled hatred and agony, he fell with a heavy crash—and lay still.

For the last few minutes Fitzroy had been conscious of a loud continuous knocking at the door. He now flung it open, and his man rushed in, followed by Herbert Eyre, of the — Hussars.

"Good Heavens! Fitzroy, what's all this?" the latter exclaimed, as the smoke cleared away somewhat and he caught sight of Carisbrooke's motionless figure, his death-like face, and the dark stain which was slowly crimsoning and widening on the pale grey carpet.

Fitzroy muttered some hasty half unintelligible explanation, and dispatched his servant for a doctor. Captain Eyre, who had been kneeling by the unconscious man's body, now rose slowly.

"He is dead," he said in a low, shocked voice.

* * * * *

Carisbrooke, however, was not dead, though for the next few weeks it was touch-and-go with him. His mother, old Lady Carisbrooke, who came up to town as arranged, on the day after her daughter-in-law's unfortunate journey, found the household at 21, Queen Street, in a state of demoralized confusion—the prevailing opinion among the servants seeming to be that "‘my lady’ had left Sir Denzil, and that Sir Denzil had shot himself and Mr. Fitzroy too."

Fitzroy himself, pale and haggard from loss of blood and anxiety, and with his arm bandaged, arrived in a hansom at this juncture, hoping to find the younger Lady Carisbrooke there, and to take her to her still unconscious husband, who, of course, could not be moved. He explained in as few words as possible the true facts of the much-garbled story, and bore off the poor distracted old lady to her son's bedside, where she insisted on installing herself as head nurse. From his wild unconscious ravings she learned something of the storm of bitter jealousy which had possessed him during these weeks

before his wife's disappearance, his misery, and the dark thoughts that had come afterwards. She felt intensely grieved and terribly anxious, besides being exceedingly shocked that her son should harbour such unworthy thoughts of his poor little wife ; for between this mother and daughter-in-law there was a deep and lasting affection, and that there was some terrible mistake somewhere the former never doubted for a moment. And all this time, in spite of the most searching and rigid inquiries, nothing had been heard of Joan ; for the very simple reason that Nan Connor was not in the way of hearing of inquiries of any kind, and indeed had been fully employed of late in nursing her visitor through a kind of low fever, from which she was only now beginning to recover (for Nan considered herself an able doctor, and would have scorned to employ any other). Besides, not the most astute of the detective force would have thought of looking for Lady Carisbrooke in a little half-concealed cottage inhabited by an eccentric old woman, who "kept herself to herself," and rarely interchanged words with any one. The only clue would have been Joan's little pencilled note to her husband ; and the fate of that we know.

Fitzroy, whose wound was, as he said, the merest scratch, was really a great comfort to old Lady Carisbrooke at this time, and she conceived a sincere liking for him, which was considerably augmented when she found that his *fiancée*, Nora Duckworth, was the daughter of a very old friend of her own, whom she had not seen for some years.

At last Carisbrooke was pronounced comparatively out of danger, though he remained so weak, and altogether

his condition was so unsatisfactory that his doctors were afraid he would slip through their fingers after all. As soon as he was well enough to comprehend where he was, he struck dismay to the hearts of his nurses and medical attendants by insisting upon returning to his own home without delay. In vain they remonstrated with him; assured him that he was not in a fit state to be moved; that it was as much as his life was worth, etc.; he worked himself up into such an alarming state of excitement that they gave him his way, and he did go home—with the not unnatural result that he had a serious relapse, and was confined to his bed again for a week.

During that week something happened. Joan came home.

Such a white, changed, fragile-looking Joan! Old Lady Carisbrooke wept tears of mingled joy and grief over her, kissed her and made much of her, and listened with shocked and loving sympathy to her pitiful little story. But Sir Denzil did not even know she was in the house. He was still so alarmingly weak that all excitement had to be avoided for him; and now that his feverish ravings were past, his wife's name never passed his lips.

About this time Fitzroy induced his *fiancée* to call at the pretty house in Queen Street, where she soon became a frequent and welcome visitor, for she and Joan "took to each other" amazingly. She (Nora) had quite buried her former jealousy, and she was heartily sorry for the poor little wife, whose foolish, though innocent, thoughtlessness had so nearly been the cause of such a terrible tragedy. And yet, at the bottom of her heart Nora

sympathized heartily with Carisbrooke, and almost forgave his murderous designs upon her future husband, for she knew by experience the madness of being "wroth with one we love," and judged his jealousy as a husband by exactly trebling her own. She and Denzil had been exceedingly fond of each other in the old boy and girl days—though never in a sentimental sense—and she, if any one, had known how to manage him in his most impossible moods.

It was one day towards the end of August, and Denzil, who was now well enough to be downstairs for a little in the afternoons and evenings, was lying, wrapped in his dressing-gown, on the large sofa in the library. He was painfully changed. It was not so much the change that always follows severe illness—though that was markedly visible too—but a radical change of expression. His face wore a look of hopeless mental suffering, together with an indescribably bitter, brooding melancholy that nothing dispelled, and that deepened day by day. He rarely spoke, and when he did, his words were cold, curt, and never more than were absolutely necessary.

Silence had reigned in the room for some time, and Lady Carisbrooke, with some trepidation, was revolving in her mind the best possible way of announcing Joan's return, when she was roused from her meditations by her son's voice, more softened and tender than it had been since his illness.

"Poor little mother!" he said faintly; "how pale and worn you are looking. You have had a sad time with me, I fear." He put out his hand as he spoke and drew her towards him. "It is only you and I now, mother," he went on unsteadily; and his lips quivered.

"Oh, my dear boy!" she broke out, forgetting in her distress to lead up to the subject that had occupied her thoughts so long, "you are breaking your heart, and mine too! You know it! If Joan were to come back to you, would you not—" She stopped, almost terrified at the effect of her words; for with a smothered exclamation, Denzil raised himself on his arm, his eyes dark with a look alike pitiful and terrible to see.

"To come back to me!" he repeated hoarsely. "To come back to me! Oh, my God—don't you know? Don't you know that all is over between us—that she has left me—that—that she is not fit for your pure lips to name——?"

"Oh, Denzil, my dear," she interrupted him, weeping, "there is some terrible mistake here. How can you harbour such thoughts of your own wife? Mr. Fitzroy has told me everything——"

But her son gripped her arm fiercely.

"*What!*" he articulated between his shut teeth. "*He* has told you, has he? *D——n* him! Has he told you that—that it was for him she left me? Has he told you that I have sworn to kill him—that I swear it now—that—that——" He stopped, literally choking with fury, and fell back, half-fainting, on his pillows. But the next moment, with an almost superhuman effort, he had recovered himself. "Listen, mother," he said, grasping the terrified old lady's hand almost painfully, and speaking with difficult, panting breath. "Never mention to me again the woman who—was once—my wife. Do you hear me? I tell you I *saw* her—it was no matter of hearsay, or of conjecture—I *saw* her rush after that fellow—get into the carriage—throw herself into his

arms—Oh God! can I ever forget it? You do not know,” he went on wildly, “you do not know all that went before—all that I have had to bear—what a hell upon earth my life has been of late! She is dead to me, I tell you—worse than dead!”

* * * * *

“I never heard of such a thing in all my life!” exclaimed Miss Duckworth, when the above little scene had been reported to her by the almost heartbroken old lady. (She was a capable young person, Miss Duckworth, and her friends of both sexes invariably made her their *confidante* in all their griefs and joys.) “I simply never *heard* of such a thing! For Joan’s sake—for George’s sake—for Denzil’s own sake—the thing must be put straight before he gets well, or there is no saying what may happen. And the state of mind he is in must be doing him far more harm than a little excitement would do. Let *me* arrange this, dear Lady Carisbrooke. I understand your son pretty well—at least I used to; and I think by departing slightly—very slightly—from the truth, I can make him listen to reason.”

The conspirators therefore laid their heads together and concocted plans, deep and wily and inscrutable.

The next evening, half-an-hour or so after Carisbrooke had made his usual pretence of eating his dinner, his mother said cheerfully:

“Denzil, do you feel well enough to see a visitor?”

“No,” he answered rather ungraciously, “I certainly do not.”

“Because,” she went on, “I have asked Nora Duckworth—you remember Nora?—to stay with me for a

few days. I have been feeling rather dull lately ; and she is so bright and lively, I think she will cheer me up. She came this afternoon, and is very anxious to see you."

"Oh, I can't see her," he answered wearily and impatiently ; "I don't want to see her."

Just at that moment the door opened, and Nora herself entered. Carisbrooke looked anything but pleased ; the visitor, however, made herself so agreeable, talking neither too much nor too little, skilfully avoiding all dangerous subjects, and above all taking care to make her visit a comparatively short one—that Denzil felt all his old friendly feeling towards her revive, and even admitted to his mother afterwards that "little Nora" had grown into a very charming sensible woman.

On the next day but one after this, the "charming sensible woman"—having meanwhile succeeded by the exercise of various spells and wiles in establishing the old half-confidential relations between herself and the invalid, except, notably, as regarded Joan—considered that her plan was ripe for execution. It was just dusk, and Carisbrooke was, as usual, lying upon the sofa, for he could only sit up for a very short time every day. He was staring with gloomy haggard eyes at the fast-darkening window, one arm under his head, his whole attitude and expression denoting utter physical and mental exhaustion. He had not spoken for some time ; indeed he had been in a more than ordinarily morose and impracticable mood all day, answering abruptly and ungraciously all remarks made to him, and sometimes, I regret to add, not answering them at all. Lady Carisbrooke had just left the room (by preconcerted arrangement), and had gone to sit awhile with Joan, who, poor

child, was very far from well. Nora had laid aside her work, for it was too dark for her to see any longer. Presently she heard a heavy sigh from the sofa; the invalid turned restlessly, and knocked down one of his pillows. Nora forestalled his feeble effort to recover it, and lifting his head gently on her arm, replaced and rearranged the pillow in its former position.

"Thank you," he murmured faintly.

"Poor fellow," she said, with a compassionate ring in her voice, "how you must miss your wife. She would be the best nurse for you."

Even in the dim light she could see that a dark flush rose to his white face. He drew his breath quickly; but he did not speak. Nora proceeded with surgical relentlessness, "I know all about her strange disappearance. Your mother and George—Mr. Fitzroy—told me all about it. Yes," as Sir Denzil sprang up from his reclining position and then fell back again from very weakness, "you are entirely in my power for the present, and so I am going to have a little talk with you," and as she spoke she drew a low chair close to the sofa and sat down. "In the first place," she went on, looking at him steadily, "I think I had better tell you that I am going to be George Fitzroy's wife."

"*Going to be his wife!*" articulated Carisbrooke. "Good God! Going to be *his* wife! *You?*"

"I hope so," was the tranquil reply.

Carisbrooke turned with difficulty, and took her hands in his.

"Miss Duckworth," he said in a hoarse whisper, as his sunken eyes met hers, "I cannot let you go blindly to what will be certain misery to you. Better to bear a

little pain *now*—than afterwards, when it will be incurable. Do you know what this man is? Do you know that it is he who—oh, *curse* him! how can I say it—?”

“Let me say it for you,” interposed Nora steadily and a trifle sternly. “You imagine that George Fitzroy, my future husband, is responsible for the disappearance of your wife! Then let me tell you that you are utterly and entirely wrong! No, allow me to speak,” she continued, as he interrupted her with a passionate gesture. “If you choose to believe such a thing of your own wife, I refuse to allow such a thing to be said of the man who is to be my husband! I know that he paid her attention during the latter part of the season—which, by the way, was more than *you* did—and I know, too, that for a time she—perhaps flirted with him. I know this because—because I was told of it—and—and I was not engaged to George then, and I—was *jealous*. For I—cared for him. But that day you saw them at the station it was all a terrible mistake! She thought it was *you*! You know you and George are not unlike, and he wore a grey travelling-coat like yours—and she, poor girl, knowing you had parted in anger, could not bear to let you go without a word. She was *horrified* when she found it was not you, and cried—George said he never saw any one cry so bitterly. For she knew”—this with cutting scorn—“what a jealous madman like you would be likely to think. So she got out at Annesley to wait for the next train up to town, and George came on to Combe, where I met him. If he had been going to run away with Lady Carisbrooke, he would hardly have written to me—his affianced wife—to meet him at Combe station, I *fancy*!” she concluded scathingly.

Carisbrooke's face had grown so ghastly white that for a moment Nora felt sorry for him; then as she thought of the thin wistful little face upstairs, she recognized the necessity of doing the thing thoroughly when she was about it. There was a short pause. Denzil covered his eyes with his hand for a moment; then he muttered, looking up at her with an almost agonized intensity:

"Oh, my God—if I could believe that what you say is true!"

"Well, really, Sir Denzil!" exclaimed Miss Duckworth in rather offended tones. But the next minute her voice changed, and she said abruptly, "But there, I'll forgive you. And I solemnly swear to you that all I have said is as true as anything can possibly be. George would have told you so—but you know you would not listen to him. Do you believe me?" she added rather imperiously.

He did not answer immediately; indeed he did not answer her question at all. Then he said with a terrible agitation in his face and voice:

"Then—if this be true—where is she—where is my wife?"

"Ah, that of course is yet to be found out," said the operator sadly. "The detectives have been unable to find the slightest clue to her whereabouts." (Which was perfectly true.) "I fear she has been taken ill somewhere; but surely in that case she would have written, or got some one to write for her."

Through Denzil's heart, swift and keen, rushed the remembrance of that crushed, pencil-addressed envelope—and its fate. An agony of remorse and despair took possession of him. His lips under his heavy moustache

quivered painfully ; then he said in a voice that shook like a woman's,

"May God forgive me!—she did write to me! But I—I burnt it—unopened!"

"Oh, well," returned Miss Duckworth, after surveying him silently for a few moments, "that of course closes the door of what was our last hope! I said to your mother only a few days ago that perhaps Joan might have written to you, and that in your unreasoning jealousy and obstinacy you might have left the letter unanswered. That you should have destroyed it unopened, did not, I confess, occur to me."

Carisbrooke did not speak. He could not. Presently Nora spoke again.

"Poor Joan," she said in a low voice, as if half to herself, "I fear we can no longer hope that she—"

Sir Denzil put out his hand with an inarticulate exclamation.

"Don't!" he muttered. "Don't—for pity's sake!"

Nora rose and walked to the window ; and there was a long silence.

Then after a moment's struggle, Carisbrooke, who was worn out and quite unfit for any excitement, besides being as weak as a baby, buried his face on his arm, and gave way to a paroxysm of terrible, agonized, though almost silent weeping.

Nora, possibly for the first time in her life, felt both frightened and dismayed, and almost ready to cry herself. She began to tremble for the consequences of her "plan," which had succeeded only too well. With a troubled anxious glance towards the sofa, she turned and went swiftly out of the room.

Carisbrooke lay there motionless and utterly exhausted, for what seemed to him a long time. The room was almost quite dark. He heard the door open and shut ; but he did not raise his head.

All at once a tremulous little voice spoke close to his ear.

"Denzil!" it said.

He started violently, and half raised himself on his arm.

"What—who is it?" he gasped.

A pair of warm arms stole round his neck ; a pair of soft lips pressed his cheek.

"It is I!" the voice said. "It is Joan!"

There was an infinitesimal pause—a suppressed cry—and she was clasped tightly in his arms, held close to his wildly-beating, remorseful heart.

"Joan!" he muttered passionately. "Oh, my *love*!"

Joan crept closer into his arms, and cried away all her fears and misery on his heart. And her fair little face was wet not only with her own tears, but with his also.



ONE OF THE MANY!



ONE OF THE MANY!



THEY had been married for rather more than a year —Jim Carrol and his pretty little wife—and their baby daughter was two months old.

He was a fine fellow, was Jim—well set-up, and good to look at; chivalrous, upright, and honest as the day. But though he came of a good old stock—of which he was the last—he was only a clerk in a London architect's office, with a miserable salary of one hundred pounds a year, which of course he might lose with his situation any day. It will be clear, I hope, to the meanest understanding that under these circumstances he had not the smallest right to think of matrimony. So when he had the audacity to propose for Marjory Linton—niece and ward of the pompous and wealthy old Joseph Linton, of Manchester—that gentleman gave him a very short shrift, and promptly showed him the door. And when, a month later, pretty independent Marjory ran away with this same handsome, impecunious Jim Carrol, her irate uncle—to use his own expressions—"washed his hands of her, and closed his doors against her and her husband

for ever." At this terrible sentence Marjory did not trouble herself very much ; nor did her husband suffer it to affect his peace of mind. He was too happy to care whether all the rich old men in Europe closed their doors against him—or otherwise.

They lived in a tiny house in a red-bricked, pointed-gabled terrace at Camberwell ; and they had enough to do to pay the rent, and to make ends meet generally, especially after the baby came. But they loved each other passionately, and that made things easier. Marjory was the most sunny-hearted and hopeful of little women ; and she was quite sure that some day, Dornton and Cox, —awakening to a sense of Jim's abilities—would take him into partnership, and make his fortune.

But alas ! for Marjory's dreams, on the particular evening on which this story opens, Carrol was wending his way homewards dejectedly enough ; for Dornton and Cox, having had heavy losses lately, were reducing their staff of clerks ; and among those dismissed to-day was James Carrol. Jim felt stunned and bewildered ; for situations were not as plentiful as blackberries in London in 1884, any more than they are now.

"Oh, Jim, how late you are !" cried little Mrs. Carrol, as she flew to the door to meet her husband. "I thought you were *never* coming ! I *had* to put baby to bed, at last."

"Had you, dear ?" he answered absently, as he followed her into the small but cosy sitting-room.

He looked depressed and out of sorts, Marjory thought. Perhaps he had one of his bad headaches. But like a wise little wife she asked no questions ; only poured out his tea, and gave him his slippers. He did not eat any-

thing, she noticed ; but sent up his cup to be filled again and again, draining it each time feverishly.

He was very silent, too.

"Is anything the matter, dear?" his wife said at last, in anxious tones.

"Yes, Marjory," he answered, with an effort. Then, after a pause, he told her.

For a moment her sunny face was clouded ; this was a contingency which they had never contemplated. Then she said bravely—

"Never mind, Jim. It will not be difficult for you to get another situation. I see scores of advertisements in the papers every day!"

But Carrol was not so sanguine. He was of a more gloomy temperament than Marjory ; and would not be cheered, not even when baby woke up, and smiled and cooed in his face, as was her wont.

"You see, Jim," said Marjory cheerily, "we have still a good part left of your last salary. It is not quarter-day yet for a good while ; and we can economise in little things. We might let Ann go" (Ann was the small maid-of-all-work) ; "she is really getting very careless ; she broke *three* plates yesterday. If I have a charwoman to come in on Saturdays, I can easily manage the work myself. Baby is so good ; and requires so little attention."

Jim put his arm round her as she knelt beside him.


"Dear little woman," he said, "I couldn't let you do that. Not yet, at least."

They studied the paper diligently day after day. Carrol answered innumerable advertisements, both by post and personally, but in vain ; though he spent an

alarming sum in postage stamps, and returned night after night, weary, heartsick, and footsore.

The days went on; quarter-day drew near, and passed; and the Carrols' little store of money melted away. For the baby had been ill; and several tradesmen's bills, small but imperative, had had to be paid. The weather was oppressively hot and enervating, and Marjory's little face began to look pinched and worn; for the baby was peevish and fretful, requiring constant nursing and attention; and the servant had been dismissed some time ago.

Another week passed. Jim felt almost desperate, for he could obtain no employment; and to make matters worse, the baby fell ill again. It seemed a kind of wasting, nameless illness. She cried and wailed night and day, and grew almost hourly more shadowy-looking. The doctor whom Carrol at last called in shook his head, asked a few questions, advised change of air, and ordered the young mother to take "plenty of nourishing food." With a view to furthering the latter object—change of air being out of the question—Jim pawned his watch and chain. Poor fellow, he felt shamefaced and embarrassed enough as he took the ticket, and buttoned his coat over his now chainless waistcoat. But the money so obtained kept them going for some little time; and Carrol, meanwhile, did not for a day relax his efforts to obtain employment. He searched with anxious diligence in each evening's paper the column devoted to "vacant situations," and answered various advertisements which seemed singularly suitable. But those who have studied that column—not for amusement or curiosity, but for dear life—know that of these advertisements only too



many are simply *swindles*, and that the comparatively few which are *bond fide* are speedily secured by those who have either the influence or the experience which Jim Carrol had not. He set off every morning for the City, neglected no opportunity, left no stone unturned, but in vain.

He used to "dine in town," he told his wife ; but in reality nothing passed his lips from the time he went out in the morning until he returned, unsuccessful, hopeless, and exhausted, in the evening. Marjory never guessed this, and she herself did without absolute necessities, silently, and with uncomplaining cheerfulness. It was a terrible time for them both. Perhaps it was hardest on Jim, for he had not Marjory's elastic, hopeful nature, her happy, almost childlike faith and trust that things would be better by-and-by. He felt, too, that *he* had brought her to this life of poverty and privation, which he seemed so powerless to avert ; and as he thought of the future—grim and black, and uncheered by any gleam of hope—his heart sickened and died within him.

In September they moved out of their pretty home, to a very small and dingy cottage which stood alone, a little way back from a side street, behind a timber-yard. It was not an attractive dwelling, but it was very cheap ; and the rent of their former house was now out of the question. To defray the various inevitable expenses connected with the removal, and one or two other necessary outlays, they sold some of their furniture, and a few other things besides.

Marjory's jewellery had all gone long ago.

One day, in walking westward along Fleet Street, Carrol met an old fellow-clerk, by name Archie Lyle,

"Hallo, Carrol!" Lyle exclaimed, grasping the former's hand heartily, and turning to walk alongside. "How are you? Haven't seen you for a month of Sundays. Why, you look down in the mouth, old man! What's up, eh?"

"Nothing particular," replied the other, coldly enough; "except that I have been out of a situation since I left Dornton and Cox. Inspecting public buildings—when you have a wife and child to keep on nothing—is not a particularly exhilarating or lively occupation," he continued bitterly.

"By Jove, no!" said the other in serious tones. He was a good-natured, easy-going fellow, who had rarely known the want of a five-pound-note, and who, as a rule, had only to sit still, and let things come to him.

"I'm awfully sorry, old fellow," he went on awkwardly. "You know I'll never forget the lift you gave me two years ago. I'm awfully sorry," he continued, with less tact than good-nature; "upon my soul, I don't know when I was so hard up as I am this month. Until I get my next——"

"Confound you! What are you talking about?" interrupted Carrol haughtily. "Do you take me for a beggar?"

Lyle murmured some confused apology.

"I don't want your money," Carrol went on in brusque tones. "Can you tell me of anything I can get to do? *Anything*. I am not proud," with a short laugh.

The other cogitated, then shook his head.

"By the way," he said suddenly, when they had crossed several streets in comparative silence, "you are a good draughtsman, are you not? You have a good idea of plans and that?"

"I ought to have," returned Carrol dryly, "seeing I have been a clerk in an architect's office for the last three years."

"Ah, yes, to be sure. Well, I know designs are wanted for a new hospital somewhere near Manchester. The premium is a hundred pounds. Now——"

"For God's sake, tell me," interrupted the other eagerly and hoarsely, "do you think I have any chance?"

"Well," said Lyle, "I was going to have a try. My father has an idea I ought to distinguish myself in that line; but I'm an awful duffer on plans—always was. So if you care to go in for it—it's a goodish premium—it might be worth your while. And, by the way, Carrol, don't sign your own name; for I believe old Linton, your wife's uncle, is to be one of the judges. He is still no end down on you; and—it might make a difference. See? Sign it—oh, anything you like, and send it under cover to me. You can trust me not to father it," he added, laughing. "I'll send you all the particulars tomorrow, and let you know whenever the thing's decided."

"Lyle, I cannot thank you sufficiently," said Carrol unsteadily, "though I fear there is very little chance for me."

"Pooh!" replied the other in airy tones, "you've as good a chance as any of the rest."

"How soon must it go in?" asked Carrol feverishly.

"Ah, let's see—I think in a fortnight—but I'll let you know."

They were in the Strand by this time, and Lyle stopped at the nearest restaurant, for it was past two o'clock.


Carrol declined his companion's invitation to accompany him, and with a grasp of the hand the two men

parted. Jim turned down a side-street, and from thence through the Embankment-gardens to the river. He did not feel very hopeful, for when the body is weak, the spirit is apt to be weak too ; and big, stalwart-looking fellow as he was, Carrol had but little stamina ; and the past months of ceaseless anxiety—and lately, of almost starvation—had told on him terribly. He walked slowly along the Embankment, and across Westminster Bridge, and so home.

Marjory met him with her usual cheery smile ; but he fancied her sweet face was paler and more worn-looking than ever ; and the baby's eyes—unnaturally large and bright—seemed to follow him reproachfully. His wife clapped her little hands joyfully when he told her of Lyle's proposal ; and she was so merry and hopeful all the evening that Jim felt his spirits rise. She prepared a nice little supper for him, too ; and Jim did not notice—for a wonder—that one or two of their cherished books had disappeared. Baby was very good to-night, she did not cry at all ; and the evening was the most cheerful they had passed for some time.

In the evening of the following day came the promised letter from Lyle ; and as soon as it was light next morning Carrol began his task. He worked hard and patiently, but he suffered terribly from nervous headaches ; he took even less food than usual ; and the baby's constant monotonous wail made him sometimes feel half-crazy.

At last the drawing was finished. Carrol signed it “ ‘Isola,’ care of A. Lyle, Esq.” (as his friend had suggested). Marjory thought it beautiful, and had no doubt of its being successful. But Carrol was not so sanguine.



However, he sent it off at once; and Marjory already began to calculate how long a time must elapse before its fate would be decided.

It was weary waiting, though; and to Jim—aye, and to Marjory too—the once-dreaded pawnshop became sadly and painfully familiar. Meanwhile their baby was slowly but surely fading away from them.

One afternoon Carrol returned somewhat earlier than usual from the City, whither he had been in answer to some luring will-o'-the-wisp advertisement. It was a dull wet day; and as he turned up the narrow street which led to his home, his heart sank with a curious undefined dread. They had been up with the baby all night; but she had seemed better and brighter when Jim left in the morning.

Marjory met him, as she always did, at the door. At a glance his fears were quickened.

"What is it?" he said hastily. "The child—is she worse?"

"Jim," she answered, looking up at him with dry, grief-stricken eyes; "Jim—baby is dead!"

He followed her silently to the room where the tiny creature, with waxen features so like his own, lay cold, and still, and smiling.

"When?" he asked in a choked voice.

"Just three hours ago," she replied monotonously.

Carrol stood looking down on all that was left to him of his baby-daughter, and smoothed the short fluffy hair with a strange wistful look in his dark sunken eyes.

"Poor little thing!" he said, sadly and brokenly. "God knows what she is spared!"


There was a silence; for Marjory could not speak.

The rain dripped on the window-sill outside ; the wind shook the casement, and moaned in the chimney. Then, with a quick dry sob, Carrol took his wife in his arms ; and they mingled their tears together.

A few more days passed, and the baby was buried. Even *that* was a struggle to the poverty-stricken father and mother. It was wonderful how they missed the tiny thing—theirs for so short a time—her funny, winning baby ways ; and even her fretful, peevish cries. To Marjory, during the long hours when her husband was absent, the house seemed horribly, unnaturally still and desolate.

The weather was wet and chilly ; and Jim caught a cold which ended in a sharp attack of bronchitis, and left him more spiritless and haggard-looking than ever. So the autumn dragged on.

At last—one dreadful day when even Marjory broke down, and when Jim looked so weak and ill as he set off on his weary and fruitless quest for work, that it almost broke his wife's heart to see him—at last, privately, and with many pangs of humbled pride, Mrs. Carrol wrote to her uncle. She did not tell her husband, for she knew that if she did, nothing would induce him to let the letter go. The answer came soon enough ; and it so chanced that Carrol met the postman at the door, and took the letter from him. He gave it to his wife, and waited while she read it ; then, seeing her face blanch, took it from her trembling hands, and with compressed lips glanced at the few words it contained. It was short and to the point.



"DEAR MARJORY,

"If you like to leave your husband, I will take you back to your old home. On *no other terms*, and in *no other way* will I help you. You took your own way; and now you may take the consequences.

"JOSEPH LINTON."

It said much for Jim's utter heart-sickness, that he did not even show any displeasure at Marjory's having written. He only said gently—

"You should not have asked him, dear."

But passionate little Marjory tore up the letter, and threw it into the fireplace.

It haunted Jim, though. If it were not for him, he thought, wretchedly, his Marjory would be cared for again as she ought to be. He knew her too well to think she would leave him. No word had come of his drawing; he had almost given up hope; a deadly, horrible depression seemed to have taken possession of him. Every way seemed closed to him—save *one*.

"Dear," he said one night with an effort—they had been sitting silent for a long time in the dismantled little sitting-room—"would you not like—to go back—to Manchester?"

"What, without *you*, Jim?" she cried, with incredulous amazement in her tired little voice.

"Yes,"—very steadily.

"Ah, Jim,"—in tones of keen reproach—"do you *want* me to go?"

"My darling, you need not ask me that,"—and Jim's voice shook slightly. "But—it would be better—for you!"

"Ah, my dear," she said with an attempt at her old sauciness, "you need not hint; you can't get rid of me. Don't think it!"

Then she suddenly laid her curly head on his knee, and began to cry.

"Oh, Jim," she sobbed, "*don't* send me away! How can you speak so? You break my heart! Ah, darling, you could not do without me, could you?"

"God forgive me, no," he answered hoarsely. "You are all I have!" As he spoke he drew her into his arms, and held her against his breast. She clung to him, sobbing passionately, for a long time.

"Marjory," he said suddenly, "have you had anything to eat to-day? For you ate nothing this morning."

"Yes, dear, of course I have," she answered, sitting up, and drying her tears.

"What had you?"—noting with a pang how wan and weak she looked, and what heavy shadows lay under her sweet brown eyes.

"Oh, all I wanted."

"I know what *that* means," he said, in low, agitated tones. "Child, you are starving yourself to death! I am *killing* you—you, my little Marjory, who are dearer to me than my own soul! You are dying before my eyes—as our baby died—and I can do nothing—*nothing*! Oh, my God—this is *torture*!" And laying his head down on his arms on the table, he, too, sobbed—a man's heavy, heart-rending sobs, tearless and bitter.

In an instant Marjory's arms were round his neck, her lips resting on his dark bent head.

"Hush, dear boy, hush," she said, in her quaint little motherly way. "You are talking nonsense, dear. I

haven't the slightest thought of dying, you foolish Jim. Don't, my dear, don't!" she went on imploringly.

But Carrol's self-control seemed to have deserted him utterly; and for a time his agitation was terrible.

Then there was a long silence, broken at last by Marjory's voice in anxious tones—

"*You* have eaten nothing to-day, Jim, I am quite sure; and you are quite faint, and worn-out."

"My darling, I could not eat," he answered wearily, raising his head and leaning back in his chair. (There were only two chairs in the room now, and very little else.)

Marjory's soft brown eyes filled again with tears; but she resolutely winked them away, and said, trying to smile—

"We will make up for lost time, and have some supper. Then things will look brighter. I have an idea, do you know, that our luck is going to take a turn."

Jim smiled faintly; his ideas pointed in a diametrically opposite direction.

"And therefore," Marjory went on, with a gaiety the more touching to Jim because he knew it was assumed for his sake, "we will go out and buy something for supper, my dear Jim. A great fellow like you cannot possibly live on bread and tea—and not much of that—as you have been doing. Now I wonder"—looking round the room meditatively,—"*if there is nothing more we can put away?*" (They always called it "putting away.")

Carrol did not speak. He could not, just then. Marjory stole softly upstairs to their bedroom, and slowly opened a small box which stood there. It contained

nothing of much value, seemingly. Only a few baby clothes, and a tarnished silver rattle, of which latter the tiny bells tinkled merrily as Marjory lifted it. Her tears fell thick and fast as she rubbed the pretty toy with an old glove until it shone quite brightly in the dim candle-light. Then she went downstairs. Jim was still sitting where she had left him, but he turned as she came in, and shivered slightly; for the night was chilly, and a fire was a luxury not to be thought of. She held the rattle out to him silently.

"Oh, Marjory, not that—I can't!" he said hoarsely, hiding his face in his hands.

"Yes, dear," said the sweet unsteady little voice. "We—we——" She stopped uncertainly, and, to her husband's terror and dismay, fainted suddenly and quietly away in his arms.

The next day Carrol himself wrote to old Joseph Linton. His letter was returned—unopened!

* * * * *

"Post these letters for me, King—will you?" said Archie Lyle, one October forenoon. "I'm off in a tearing hurry to catch a train. Don't forget them, there's a good fellow."

"All right," said the young man addressed; and he put the letters carelessly into the breast-pocket of his overcoat.

"Hang it all!" King said to himself the next day, "I've forgotten to post Lyle's letters. However, I don't suppose it matters much. He'll be none the wiser." He dropped them into the first pillar-box he came to, and lighting a cigar, sauntered on his way.

On the morning of this same day Carrol and his wife were standing, pale and silent, at the window of their sitting-room. They were watching for the postman. They had watched for him unspokenly, feverishly, despairingly, for many days. Soon they heard the sharp *rat-tat* on the doors in the distance. He came nearer. He knocked at the door of the house nearest theirs. Then—he passed on!

“Oh, Jim!” said the little wife despairingly.

Carrol was white to his very lips.

“Never mind, childie,” he said, putting his arm round her, and trying to speak steadily.

“Oh, my dear, I can’t help it,” she sobbed.

There was a long pause; then Marjory said, almost cheerily:

“Perhaps if you went to Mr. Lyle, he could tell you, Jim——”

“I did go, Marjory, yesterday,” he interrupted her quietly, “but he has gone from home for a fortnight. If my drawing had been successful, he would have written before he left. Try not to grieve, darling; it can’t be helped,” Jim went on, with a sickly smile. “We must try something else. I may hear of something to-day.”

“Perhaps there will be a letter to-night,” said Marjory with renewed hope, as she bid her husband good-bye at the door.

Jim came home about six, looking terribly weary and depressed. He had been unsuccessful—once more.

“No letters yet, dear,” said his wife, hastening to answer the unspoken question in his eyes. As she spoke they heard the postman’s knock in the distance; it came nearer—and died away.

"Perhaps there will be one in the morning," Marjory went on ; but her voice faltered.

In the morning! Another long, awful, sleepless night of hoping against hope, of maddening, steadily-growing despair! Jim shuddered. He was worn out, physically and mentally ; and he felt as though he *could* not stand the sickening suspense longer. As he looked at his wife, her wan, changed little face, with its pale ghost of a smile, seemed to pierce his heart.

A strange, terrible, determined look settled round his mouth ; but Marjory was leaning her curly head against his arm, and did not see his face.

The room was quite dark now, but they were still standing at the window. For a time Carrol was very still. Then he said—

"I am very tired, Marjory darling. I will lie down for a while. Don't disturb me. I—I didn't sleep last night," (nor for many nights, he might have added).

"But won't you have a cup of tea first, Jim?"

"No, I don't care for any."

"A long sleep will do you good, dear," she said, anxiously and caressingly. "You look dreadful!"

"Yes," he answered, in a strangely quiet voice, "a long sleep will do me good." Then suddenly, "Kiss me, Marjory!"

"Ah, my own dear disappointed boy!" she cried, throwing her arms round him.

He held her to him tightly, and kissed her again and again.

"My darling!" he said hoarsely. "My own darling!"

Then he let her go, and went away. She heard him go upstairs, and his footsteps echo in the room above.

Marjory sat at the window for a long, long time ; and watched the stars grow brighter and clearer in the soft dark sky. Somewhere in the distance a street-organ was wailing out an old hackneyed waltz-tune. It stirred her heart strangely. She remembered dancing that waltz with Jim, so very, very long ago—it seemed long ago, like everything else that was bright and hopeful. Even Marjory's brave little heart was heavy to-night. What would become of them, she wondered ? God only knew.

The clock in a neighbouring church-tower boomed out on the night air ; and as the last stroke died away there was a sharp knock at the door. It was the postman. Marjory took the one letter he held out to her ; and closing the door again, she went back to the sitting-room. With trembling fingers she lighted the candle, and examined the envelope eagerly. Yes—it *was* Mr. Lyle's hand-writing ! Marjory recognised it without difficulty, for it was a peculiar hand. With a beating heart she stole softly upstairs—she did not take the candle, for fear of waking Jim, should he be asleep—and peeped into the bedroom. All was still. In the pale starlight she could just make out the dim outline of his figure on the bed.

"Jim," she whispered.

No answer. He was evidently asleep.

Ah ! it seemed a pity to wake him, she thought ; and perhaps, after all, the letter held bad news. She softly laid a shawl over him in the semi-darkness, and crept downstairs again.

After looking at the fateful envelope for some time, she slowly opened it. She *could* not wait ; and she knew Jim would not mind. In another moment she uttered a little glad involuntary cry, and her lips parted in a joyful

half-incredulous smile. Could it be possible! Yes—Jim's design had been selected as the best; the premium would be his! And this was not the only good news the letter contained; for Lyle went on to say that he had heard of a vacant appointment, which he thought he could—through his father's influence—secure for Carrol.

Marjory hid her face in her hands; for a moment the revulsion of feeling was almost too much. Then in a passion of tears and thankfulness she fell upon her knees. But she could only say, "Thank God! Thank God!"

An hour passed. The moon was drifting among the stars, and streaming in through the uncurtained window, on Marjory's face wet with happy tears. The candle had burnt itself out.

Ah, what a joyous waking Jim's would be! Should she lay the letter on his pillow, to surprise him when he awoke? Or should she rouse him? Perhaps he was already awake.

She lit a fresh bit of candle, and, still holding the precious letter, went upstairs. She laid the candle down just outside the bedroom door, and entered very gently.

How *deadly* still the room was!

"Jim!" she said softly.

But Jim did not answer. How soundly he slept!

Marjory came nearer, and bent over him in the throbbing darkness. The moon had hidden herself behind one solitary cloud.

"Jim!"—a little louder.

Still that strange weird hush. A vague fear stirred her heart. She did not even hear him breathe. What if he had fainted!

The moon sailed out again, illumining part of the room, but leaving the bed in deep shadow.

"Jim darling," leaning over him and laying her arm across his neck, "a letter has come! It is——" With a sudden sickening terror she stopped and raised herself, for she felt—that her sleeve was *wet*!

Snatching up the candle, she held it over the bed, and by its flickering light she saw—ah, dear Heaven—what did she see?

Not her Jim, surely!

A white, dead face—a dark red stain on the coverlet—a ghastly wound—and cold nerveless fingers, still holding—*what*!

Ah, cruel Jim!

A long, shuddering cry rang out on the autumn night—wild—agonized—despairing. Again and again it echoed. Then all was still.

* * * * *

In the asylum at S—— there is a fair, slender woman, with solemn child-like eyes and sunny hair.

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